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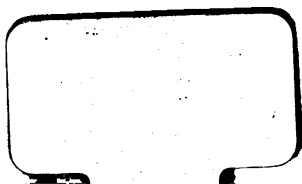
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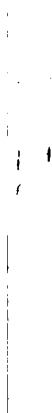
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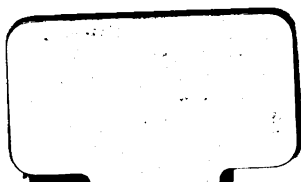
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THRICE DEAD.

CHAPTER I.

THE DOUBLE BAPTISM.

WE have already made allusion to the place which was called the *Trou-de-la-Dette*.

It was a ravine which stood on the edge of the Grand-Lande, between Guillaume Féru's mill and the Manor-House of Treguern. The cross-road, passing the end of the avenue of the Manor-House, ran along the brink of the ravine, upon the side of which a

quantity of privet had been planted to keep the ground from breaking away. In this ungrateful soil, the privet had grown up, weak and black-looking, forming a small copse about the height of a man, which reached half-way down the declivity. In the place where the privet ended, a ridge of calcareous rock, which the least touch reduced to blue dust, stood out above the stunted heath.

In the bottom of the ravine there was a narrow pool, which in summer time contained only a quantity of mud overgrown with lentils; and around the pool, shooting out their young branches in thick clusters, grew a number of willows.

In descending this place you were obliged to use your hands as well as your feet, for there was no beaten path.

Standing on the brink of the pool under the willows, and looking upwards, you saw

around you a rough circular wall of earth and rock, mounting up like the sides of a gigantic vase. Nothing else was visible, except the sky over head, which seemed to form a cover for the vase.

Among the country people, the ravine passed for a haunted spot; those who had the right, descended every two years to the banks of the pool to cut the willow twigs, which grew there unusually strong. The rest of the time no human foot ever trod this wild spot. When the peasants of the neighbourhood were obliged to pass after nightfall along the road above the privet, they hurried along, signing themselves with the cross, and closing their eyes.

That night, the tempest had filled the pool, which had overflowed its banks and surrounded the trunks of the willows, and drops of rain were still falling from the foliage.

It was about half-an-hour before dawn, at that time when the most profound darkness rests over every object. At the bottom of the ravine there was a man; the man was leaning upon a pickaxe and watching the water of the pool which the thirsty soil was slowly sucking in. He seemed to be waiting till the water had descended below a certain limit.

From time to time he raised his eyes and interrogated the star-bespangled sky.

"I shall have time," he muttered, after one of these occasions.

And he continued to watch the water as it gradually sank lower and lower.

When the soil round the foot of the largest willow was uncovered, the man raised his pickaxe and gave the first stroke upon the wet ground. The pickaxe only penetrated the inert soil an inch or so; the man struck

again, then the blows succeeded each other hard and fast. At the end of some minutes he paused to take breath.

With half the labour he would have made a good sized hole in arable land, but here his efforts had only succeeded in taking the surface off the soil.

"The valise will be safe here," he said, "when I have made its nest; and I shall be sure at least that nobody will come here to seek for it."

He once more grasped the pickaxe with both hands, which again fell heavily upon the ground at once 'wet and hard; but he only gave one blow, because he thought he heard the sound of footsteps above his head, upon the road which lay along the edge of the precipice.

He listened, but the sound had ceased; all around was silent. So he said to himself:

"My ears were tingling."

And he set to work again stoutly.

His ear had not been tingling, however; it was really the sound of footsteps which he had heard in the cross-road.

A man was running at full speed across the moor, coming from the mill, and directing his course towards the manor-house. On arriving at the brink of the ravine, the man who was running had followed the example of the one who was digging at the foot of the willow; he had paused at the dull sound of the pick-axe, then, as the noise had ceased at the same instant, he had said,

"My ears were tingling."

And he had continued his route.

It happened that the man in the ravine, almost before he had recommenced his work, again heard some one walking above him, and that the walker, at the very first step he

took, thought he heard the sound of the pickaxe once more. They both stopped again and stood listening, the one from the top the other from the bottom.

The most patient of the two was the first to solve the enigma. The most patient of the two was not the man with the pickaxe, who was in a hurry no doubt, and who set to work again after a few seconds. From that moment he heard nothing more.

He worked away with all his might, and, rebellious as the soil was, had soon formed a hole sufficiently large to hold a valise which was lying upon the ground by his side.

He took up the valise and thrust it into the hole, to see if it fitted; and as the result seemed to be favourable he raised his head with a look of satisfaction.

But, in raising his eyes, he saw a man standing before him.

"Gabriel!" he exclaimed recoiling several steps.

The new-comer remained immovable, with his arms folded across his chest.

"You did not wait for me then, Filhol, my brother?" he said in a sweetly ironical tone.

The man with the pick-axe caught up his tool and instinctively grasped it with both hands as though it had been a weapon.

"No, Gabriel, I did not wait for you," he responded.

"You were tired of waiting for me at the Tour-de-Kervoz no doubt," replied the seminarist, his tone becoming more ironical than before.

"I did not wait for you at the Tour-de-Kervoz," said Treguern.

"No? And how was that, brother?"

"Because I have an objection to crack a tonsured head."

There was a silence after this reply, which was made in a rude and menacing tone. Gabriel still remained immovable and calm in appearance ; the man whom we have called Filhol de Treguern, on the contrary nervously handled the pick-axe.

At length Gabriel advanced a step.

“ Keep off !” said Treguern.

Gabriel took another step in order to show his courage.

“ Have I done anything to offend you, my brother ?” said he in a voice which no longer retained any trace of mockery.

“ Upon my honour, Gabriel,” pronounced Filhol, turning away his head, “ you will do well not to remain here !”

“ What have I to fear then ?”

“ Gabriel, Gabriel !” exclaimed Filhol, in a tone of distress, “ I have placed perfect confidence in you ; and the door of my father’s

"It beats—it beats!" he muttered; "my head is swimming! The first time one looks over a precipice one feels giddy—but one soon gets used to it."

A second cry resounded against the walls of the ravine. Gabriel listened, shuddering in every limb, for this time he could not mistake. He had recovered somewhat from the stupor which had succeeded the crime, and the echo of the report had died away. Filhol was now only a corpse, and the cry could not have come from his lungs.

The foliage in the copse of stunted privet was agitated; someone was hurrying down the steepest part of the ravine, calling out the name of Filhol.

Gabriel drew his other pistol from his belt. A branch in the copse cracked and broke off, and Gabriel began to think that he should

not need his weapon, for the new comer, losing his balance, rolled heavily over the calcareous rocks.

He thus reached the bottom of the ravine, and, bounding to his feet, cried:

“Filhol! Filhol!”

By a miracle, his fall had left him without a wound.

The first streaks of light were appearing in the sky, and Gabriel could distinguish a man of high stature, dressed in military costume, and having but one arm. At the same moment, Roland Montfort perceived in his turn a man standing in the darkness, and sprang towards him.

“You are not Filhol!” he exclaimed, “what have you done with Filhol?”

Gabriel had already cocked his second pistol.

“Where do you come from, friend,” said

he, coldly, "that you don't know that Filhol de Treguern died of fever last year, in the month of September?"

The foot of Roland stumbled against the valise, which gave out a metallic sound.

"Ah!" said he, "God sees into the depths of this mystery! This is a witness. I have followed Treguern from the manor-house to this place, and he was carrying this valise upon his shoulder. You are Gabriel the seminarist, and you have assassinated Treguern!"

Gabriel saw then, for the first time, that his adversary held in his single hand a sharp bent sabre; but he retained all his *sang-froid*, although Roland was so close to him that the point of the sabre might have reached his bosom before he had time to raise his arm to discharge the pistol. His sharp wits, always fertile in resources, at once furnished him

with a stratagem which he immediately put into execution.

"Look down at your feet," he said, "and see whether he who is lying there with his head hanging in the pool is Filhol de Treguern."

Roland turned quickly, and the pale light of dawn showed him the corpse stretched out at the foot of the willow. He cast upon it only one look, and the muscles of his arm hardened to raise his sabre; the next instant Gabriel would have been condemned. But Gabriel had had time to rest his pistol against the trunk of the willow, in order to avoid the trembling inseparable from emotion, and, at the moment when Roland sprang upon him, a fresh report awoke the echoes of the ravine.

A groan came from Roland's chest, and his left arm, shattered at the shoulder joint, fell helplessly down by his side. This did not

stop his spring, however, and he rushed upon Gabriel, probably not yet understanding how powerless he had become. Twice, notwithstanding the frightful agony he was suffering, he tried to raise his arm, which no longer had any spring ; twice the butt-end of Gabriel's pistol sounded upon his defenceless forehead.

At the first blow, his face was bathed with blood ; at the second he closed his eyes, and reeling backwards, fell senseless by the body of Filhol.

Gabriel washed the handle of his pistol in the water of the pool and passed his wet handkerchief across his temples. By this time there was sufficient light to distinguish objects, and Gabriel gazed down upon the two bodies. He was pale, but he held his head high, and the respiration came in hard and rapid breathing from his swelling bosom.

After waiting for a second he raised the valise upon his shoulder and began slowly to climb up the side of the ravine.

* * * * *

It was during the night of the fifteenth of August, in the year 1800, that the Trou-de-la-Dette saw this double assassination.

The following day was Sunday, and in the morning the good folks of the bourg of Orlan collected, according to custom, in the parish churchyard. There was great excitement among them, a look of horror could be read upon every face, and behind the horror a good deal of curiosity was visible.

They were collected in groups talking together in low voices; the women whispered, and the children were not allowed to play among the tall grass around the grave-stones.

The bell tinkled for the first mass, but nobody, except a few pious women, quitted the graveyard to enter the church.

The principal group was composed of our friends who had been present at the party which had kept the feast of the assumption at the house of Marion Lecuyer.

The matrons had upon their heads their *cattolles* of fine plaited muslin, bearing upon their summits a cockade or top-knot, which resembled the crest of a casque; the farmers were smoking their short stemmed pipes under the brims of their straw hats, which were bent down in the form of an umbrella; the lasses exhibited their bright silver crosses attached to their cambric chemisettes; and the young fellows wore rosettes of scarlet wool, gained at shooting matches or at racing in sacks.

All this because it was Sunday; but all

this looked sad, and contrasted badly with the busy figures.

The group was assembled at the foot of a large cross.

"For that matter," said Pelo, the basket-maker, "this night has not been at all like other nights!"

"Oh! no," said a voice in the circle; "ever since yesterday I have felt that something was going to happen!"

"What time did Douairière le Brec come home?" demanded the sceptical Vincent Féru, who was almost as much excited as the others.

The question was addressed to young Mathelin.

"*Ma foi jurée*," returned the *pâtour*; "it was broad daylight when I heard her come in. But you don't know all. When I got back, after the party, I found a black horse

in the meadow. The door of the house was wide open, there were marks of dirty shoes inside, and Douairière le Brec's bed had been rolled a foot and a half out of its usual place."

The heads of the listeners shook gravely in silence.

"There was a light burning in the place where the Commander lives when he is here," added Mathelin.

"Ah!" said one of those who were standing round, "he expected this."

"But what was that they were saying at the side of the forest, Pelo?" asked one of the women.

"Serjeant Mathurin has come home to his mother's," replied the basket-maker, "and Sergeant Roland Montfort has come home to his sister's."

"There! there!" they exclaimed; "per-

haps that was he who was sleeping in the chimney corner."

"It was he, but he didn't sleep at the farmhouse, and he was out at the time when the two reports were heard somewhere on the Grand-Land."

The audience looked at each other and repeated:

"There—there!"

"Somebody saw him this morning," went on the basket-maker, "as he was going up the avenue of the manor-house. He had blood upon his face, and the sleeve of his left arm—the sleeve of his right is empty you know—was all red and black with blood from the shoulder down to the elbow."

"*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*" cried those around the cross, "what is all this going on around us."

"*Bon jour* to you, *père* Michelan!" exclaimed several voices.

The old farmer was passing along on the other side of the churchyard. He was walking with slow and painful steps, and everybody could see that his face was very pale under his thin locks of white hair.

"Good day to you, and God bless you, my children," said he, taking off his hat as he passed the door of the church and making the sign of the cross. "A man who lives in the world the years I have sees a good deal, sure; but have you ever known the time when dead bodies ran away before they could be buried?"

There was an agitation among the group, who guessed that there must be something terrible under the obscurity of this sentence, and each exclaimed:

"You have some news, father Michelan? What is it? what is it?"

The old man was some time before he spoke.

"Since Comte Filhol died," he said at length, "nobody ever pulls a trigger either in the forest or on the heath. It was not a sportsman who fired the two shots last night."

"No, no," assented the group, "that is sure and certain, it was not a sportsman."

"But who could it have been?" added some of the more curious.

"I wanted to cut some grass before mass began," pursued the old man, "as there was no fodder in the stable and as there is no harm in working before the first bell strikes; so at daybreak I sent off my nephew Jean-Marie to the bourg to find some of the men. He came back in a quarter of an hour as white

as a sheet, and could not utter a word, poor youngster. I gave him a cup of strong cider to untie his tongue, and this is what he said, as true as God is God and we are all sinners."

Old Michelan paused to take breath and the group drew closer together around him as he continued:

"Jean-Marie said to me, 'as I was passing along the road, above the ravine on the edge of the Grand-Lande, I heard somebody down in the hollow, I was too short to see over the privet bushes, so I crept through them till I got to the lower side of the copse; at the bottom of the ravine there was a hole dug, as though somebody had been there before me; and at the end of the copse, I saw a privet stick broken off, and the ground was broken away as if some-one had slipped and fell over the rocks. The pool was bank-full, and

close to the water I saw two bodies lying all covered with blood.'"

"Two bodies!" repeated the group in hollow voices.

And Pelo the basket-maker added:

"One for each shot!"

"I asked the youngster," pursued Michelan Père, "what these two bodies were like; he said that the first was a soldier and had but one arm—"

"Roland Montfort!" said one of those who stood around.

"The other," again continued old Michelan, "had his head hanging down in the pool, and was dressed in a black velvet coat, like the one the late young Comte Filhol used to wear when he went out shooting."

Michelan ceased, and there was great agitation among the *catiolles* and the straw

hats, while a low murmur was raised around the cross.

"And you didn't go to see for yourself?" exclaimed Vincent Féru; "you are not very curious, Daddy Michelan."

"I went to see for myself," replied the old man, "not because I am curious, Vincent, lad, but because I thought there might be some fellow creatures who wanted assistance. Only, when I got to the bank of the pool, I found nothing there."

"Oh!" said the disappointed group, "the youngster told a lie?"

"No he didn't, my lads. When I say nothing, I speak of the bodies; the traces of the struggle were left there plain enough in the mud, and the blood had not had time to dry up."

"But the bodies? who could have carried them away?"

"That's just what I was asking myself," replied old Michelan, "when I saw, all at once, close to me, standing with his back against the trunk of a willow, a man dressed in a long black cloak, with figures worked upon it, like what we call the instruments of the passion—the cross, the scourge, and the crown of thorns. He was as thin as a skeleton, and his grey hair fell over his fleshless cheeks. How he came up to me without my seeing or hearing him, I don't know. It's years since I have seen the Commander Malo, but I knew him in a minute."

The audience drew a long breath as Michelan stopped for an instant. At that moment, the bell inside the church tinkled for the elevation of the host, and both men and women fell on their knees upon the grass and bowed down their heads.

"The Commander Malo," continued

Michelan, when every one had got up again, "was looking at the traces of blood, and didn't seem to see me; he was muttering between his teeth those strange words nobody but he ever utters, and which nobody else understands. He said—at least I thought he said so — 'Treguern must die three times.'

"Then all at once he looked straight in my face.

"'Why are you not at the baptism?' he demanded, abruptly. 'Thy father and thy grandfather were vassals of the Treguerns. It is not every day that they take to the font a heir of the chevaliers!'

"As I stood open-mouthed, and not making any answer, he kneeled down at the foot of the willow, and examined the foot-marks, which were full of blood.

"'It is the blood of Treguern!' he mut-

tered ; 'it must be so ; the sprigs shoot out of the old tree after it is cut down. Go away, vassal ! Go to thy master's baptism ! I have something to do here.'

"He pointed his imperious finger towards the path I had come by.

"There was a hole dug at the foot of the willow, in which a pick-axe was lying. The Commander carried a hacking-knife under his arm. While obeying him, and going on towards the moor, I turned round more than once, as you may suppose, and I saw the Commander Malo turning over the ground in every place where there were marks of blood, and forming in that way a little grave ; then I saw him take the hacking knife, cut off a young willow, and make a cross with it, which he planted in the wet ground.

"But which of you," here interrupted old Michelan, "can tell me what baptism the

Commander Malo was talking about? I didn't hear the bells ring as I came across the heath, and I don't see any new-born child at the door of the church."

As he finished speaking, the good women who had been present at the first mass, came out of church, and immediately the bells began to ring as if for a christening. In the road which led to the church-yard, Fanchette the midwife could be seen advancing, dressed in her best clothes, and carrying a baby on each arm. Donairière le Brec came behind her in her silk dress, her black lace cap, and with her white crutched stick. Marianne de Treguern was walking with difficulty by her side; and the veil which she wore did not entirely conceal the paleness of her cheeks.

While the midwife, Donairière le Brec, and Marianne were getting over one of the stiles of the church-yard, a second group appeared

at another stile. These were *bonne personne* Marion Lecuyer, in tears, and Sergeant Mathurin, who were supporting, as well as they could, poor Roland Montfort, who was staggering at every step, and looked so weak that you would have thought he was going to faint every step. Roland had two large wounds on his forehead; and his left arm, surrounded with bandages, hung down by his side.

The two parties slowly crossed the green-sward, amidst the ominous silence of the country people, whose emotion and curiosity rendered them dumb; and they met at the door of the church, where the Abbe Gabriel was waiting for them, bare headed, with the mass-book in his hand.

Fanchette, the midwife, entered first, and hastened at once towards the little chapel, where the fonts were, in order to get rid of

her double burden. The rector was in his sacerdotal robes, close to the vase of polished granite which contained the baptismal water. When the two groups of whom we have spoken had followed Fanchette, the crowd of villagers made an irruption into the church, for each felt that something extraordinary was going to happen which would be worth seeing. The whole of the village were soon pressing round the baptismal chapel.

"Have these children been taken to the *commune*?" inquired the rector, before commencing the ceremony.

Fanchette responded without hesitation, like a woman who has learnt her lesson in advance:

"We often see poor little innocents die without receiving the holy baptism, because they have been taken to the *commune* before being taken to the church."

The rector expressed his approval by a sign of the head, and then asked :

“ Whose children are they ?”

You might have heard a fly passing across the church, so complete was the silence which followed this question.

Fanchette cast down her eyes, and did not reply at once ; then she half turned towards Douairière le Brec, who covered her with a fixed and imperious look.

“ This one,” said Fanchette, her voice trembling a little as she pointed to the infant she held upon her right arm, “ this one is the son of Marianne de Treguern.”

The minister had the parish register before him on a desk, and he opened it.

“ And his father ?” asked the rector.

Fanchette bowed in silence. Gabriel did not frown ; he stood with a mild and grave expression upon his face, and his arms folded

face of Roland Montfort had expressed uneasiness and doubt. He had seen the hesitation of Fanchette at the first question of the Rector, and he had noticed the imperious look which Douairière le Brec had fixed upon the midwife.

Now he fancied that he could see a strange air of triumph under the affected calm of the seminarist; there was also triumph, and still more sarcasm in the bitter smile of le Brec.

Through the veil which covered the features of Marianne, Roland tried to observe the direction of her regard, and it seemed to him that that regard sought that of the two infants of which she was not the mother.

"Woman," said he abruptly, turning towards Fanchette, "would you dare to tell a falsehood in the sanctuary of God!"

Gabriel trembled; the brows of Douairière le Brec contracted, as she grasped her white

staff with both hands; Fanchette changed colour and found no words to reply.

"She has lied!" said Roland Montfort, in a confident tone.

"She has lied!" repeated Marion Lecuyer, pointing towards her with her finger.

And the crowd, welcoming with avidity this new turn in the drama which was being played before them, began to grumble from one end of the church to the other.

"She has lied! She has lied!"

Marianne trembled, and sobbed under her veil.

"And that is not all," added Marion, casting a look of pitiful tenderness towards her brother; "Gabriel and you, François le Brec, will have to answer for the blood that has been shed!"

"Have patience, Marion, my girl," mut-

tered Douairière le Brec, "there will be time for everything."

Gabriel remained impassive.

At that moment several voices were raised near the door.

"Make room! make room!" they cried
"Here's somebody who will tell us the truth."

"Mind! out of the way!" added other voices; "make way for the Commander Malo, who is coming to recognise his nephew!"

There was not the slightest raillery in these words. The presence of Malo de Treguern, had given the ascendancy to supernatural ideas; and the months which had passed between the death of the father and the birth of the son, were no longer thought of.

From the time of the great Chevalier Tanneguy, whose tomb-stone stood there proud and grave, close to the altar, had not

this race of Treguern been one tissue of mysteries?

They made a passage for the Commander Malo who, after piously kneeling down upon the first flag stone inside the church, hastened towards the baptismal font.

The visage of Gabriel had paled at last, and Donairière le Brec had hard work to keep the smile of defiance which was playing among the wrinkles of her countenance.

On reaching the centre of the chapel, the Commander Malo went straight to the fatherless child the midwife had presented first, and laying his hand upon him, regarded him for a long time.

"See,—see!" muttered the crowd, "the false priest and the witch have paid Fanchette Féru to tell a lie!"

"It is not the Commander Malo that is to be deceived," added old Michelan, "he who

said on the bank of the pool—‘It is the blood of Treguern.’ ”

The Commander left the fatherless child at length, and turned towards the one which had been presented second as the son of the late Count Filhol.

He cast only one disdainful glance towards this infant; and then his lips parted, and they thought he was about to pronounce the sentence.

But he seemed to alter his mind; his regard passed from Gabriel to Douairière le Brec, then to Marianne, then the wrinkles of his forehead contracted under his long gray locks. He kissed the crucifix which hung upon his chest; and his whole appearance showed that he was engaged in some profound meditation.

His lips moved again, and Roland alone heard him murmur—

"It must be!—it is thus that the name of Treguern will rise once more!"

He placed his extended hand upon the head of the infant he had before regarded with contempt, and pronounced aloud: "This is the son of my nephew Lord Filhol, Count of Treguern."

Gabriel and Douairiere le Brec breathed again as if their bosoms had been relieved of a crushing weight.

The two children were christened, viz.: the one who had no father under the name of Stéphane, and the son of Filhol under the name of Tanneguy.

As they were leaving the church, the villagers saw four *gendarmes* in the churchyard. When Roland came out in his turn, supported by Sergeant Mathurin and his sister Marion, Gabriel the seminarist, who had preceded him, pointed him out to the *gendarmes* saying:

"That is he who shed the blood."

Douairière le Brec challenged Marion with a look, as she stood dumb with terror and surprise, and repeated :

“ Yes, that is he.”

The *gendarmes* arrested Roland Montfort in the name of the law.

This is the explanation which ran through the bourg : A stranger had stopped the night before, at the tavern on the outskirts of Redon where Mathurin and Roland had halted ; this stranger carried a valise full of gold, and he had been met the preceding night on the Grand-Lande, near the copse of privet. A struggle had taken place at the bottom of the ravine which terminated the Grand-Lande, and that struggle had left rude traces upon the body of Roland.

The stranger had disappeared as well as the valise, so Roland was accused of having murdered the stranger.

After nightfall, Gabriel took the way to-

wards Redon. He was on foot, and carried a load. At Redon, exhausted as he was by fatigue, he sought out the house of one of those adventurous merchants who continued, in spite of the war, to trade with London.

He counted out upon the counter of the merchant one hundred thousand francs in gold, and the merchant furnished him with a receipt, by which he engaged to convey that sum to London, to the offices of the *Campbell Life Assurance Company*, the first in date of all the companies which have speculated upon human mortality.

Having done this, Gabriel said to himself :

“I won the first stake, and I will win it twenty times more.”

As to the twenty years of life which were necessary, Gabriel had not the slightest doubt.

He bought a piece of bread with the last penny he had in his pocket, and returned to the town of Orlan on foot, where he went to bed in his garret.

CHAPTER II.**THE VAMPIRE.**

THE drives in the Bois de Boulogne were beginning to be crowded with carriages, as the sun, less ardent, was sinking towards the horizon. It was the day of the feast of the assumption, in the year 1820; consequently, twenty years after the events which we have related.

The young boughs of the trees were thrusting

forth their shoots, covered with foliage. The last cutting of the Bois de Boulogne had been performed against the rules and regulations, by the sabres of the Cossacks. Thank God ! the Cossacks had passed over the frontier, never to return, and the Bois de Boulogne, forcing the sap, ~~was hiding~~ beneath its rich verdure the outrage of its healed scars. There was still a little lack of shade, because the trunks of the trees had not had time to branch out, but the foliage was so fresh, that you felt patient, and Parisian fashion already went to the Bois, if it was only to see it growing.

It was five o'clock in the evening. In the road which leads from the Château de Madrid to Bagatelle, the oblique rays of the sun were shining through the dusty atmosphere ; and all around, in the neighbouring avenues, was heard the rolling of equipages.

Three horsemen appeared round a corner of one of the rides. They were three *élégants*, mounted *comme il faut*, and dressed in the most approved style; coats, which fitted close at the waist, and showing a vest cut *en beck de clarinette*, with large wadded and goffered lapels falling over leg of mutton sleeves; pantaloons of nankeen, fastened under the boot by straps as narrow as laces; cravats which were supported by whalebone stiffeners, and hats widened at the top, the brims of which curled up over the ears like the *volutes* which surmount Doric columns.

One of them was stout, one thin, and one between the two. The stout one was named the Baron Brocard; the medium one bore the name of M. de Champeaux; he came from province — ; the thin one was the Chevalier de Noisy, nick-named *le Sec*, on account

of the absence of *embonpoint*, which characterised his person.

Just as they were leaving the path to enter the avenue, M. de Champeaux, the provincial, said :

“The three Freux ! Valérie the *morte* ! And what next ? What mother goose tales ! Oh ! come ! they still talk of ghosts then at your famous Marquise de Castellat’s ?”

“There are some very strange things,” responded the Chevalier de Noisy, with emphasis, “things which ought not to be laughed at.”

“The fact is,” said Champeaux, naïvely, “that my aunt has often related stories to me which made my flesh creep. Only fancy, when I was quite a youngster, she told me how a white goat—”

The stout Baron Brocard shrugged his

shoulders with a laugh. He was a free thinker. Our three cavaliers were going forward at a walking pace.

The Chevalier de Noisy stopped at the moment when the provincial was about to go on speaking, and pointed out to him the shady path which wound round towards the little pheasantry of the Château de Madrid.

"I can tell you that these people are not like most folks," he muttered. "One can't help believing when one has seen—"

"And you have seen something there, chevalier?" said Champeaux, also pointing to the entrance of the shady walk.

"The three Freux of Britany?" added the Baron Brocard, jestingly.

"Or at least Valérie the morte?" said M. de Champeaux.

The chevalier slowly shook his head.

"The three Freux and Valérie the morte,"

he repeated, "are histories more or less veracious, which are told at the house of the marquise, because madame la marquise is like me; she believes in such histories. I don't mind others being less credulous; but when I have seen with my own eyes and affirm that I have seen—"

"Chevalier," interrupted Champeaux, "you have not affirmed anything at all."

Noisy had turned the head of his horse towards the shady walk.

"You recollect," he asked, lowering his voice, in spite of himself, "that beautiful young girl whose name was Laurence, and who was the youngest sister of the marquise?"

"She who was to have married M. Gabriel de Feuillans?" said Brocard. "Certainly I remember her."

"Last year," continued the Chevalier de Noisy, "I came here early one morning to

meet M. Saint Julien, who had called me *Le Sec*. I had not slept all night, not because I was afraid, but because I was seriously annoyed at being obliged, from time to time, to run a sabre through some honest young fellow, through that stale joke of *Noisy le Sec*. I was before the time, and it was not yet light when I reached the Bois all by myself, so I walked up and down to pass the time away. When I arrived at the place where we are now I heard a horse trotting along the path you see there. The dawn was beginning to break, and I saw a horse's head come from the shade, and then an amazone, whose face was concealed by a thick veil.

"I should say," here interrupted the chevalier, "that I had been, like a good many others, madly in love with the beautiful Laurence, and that her unfortunate death had thrown me into a very low state. When the

horsewoman passed close to me her veil was raised, and I fancied that she bowed and smiled. I fell down on my knees in the middle of the avenue, for I had recognised Laurence de Treguern."

Champeaux and the baron both started.

"She had been dead more than six months," continued Noisy, "and I took that as an omen. So I presented myself upon the ground feeling certain that I should remain there."

"Which did not prevent poor Saint Julien from going to the other world in your place," said Champeaux. "They talk about that devil of a thrust to this day."

"The fact of the apparition exists none the less," replied the chevalier. "I have not seen the three Freux, as they are called, nor the shade of Valérie; but since the affair is connected with the Treguerns, there must be some truth in it."

As he uttered those two expressions, "the three Freux, the shade of Valérie," which to us can have no very precise meaning, but which were connected with certain legends which were talked of in one of the most elegant salons in Paris, Champeaux exclaimed, half laughing, half surprised,

"*Pardieu!* here are three personages from the other world, who may very well be the three Freux!"

At the same instant, Brocard said:

"Must not this be the impalpable Valérie?"

A young lady, dressed in a black riding-habit, and riding a magnificent horse of the same colour, came down the shady path, crossed the avenue swift as an arrow, and disappeared along the bridle-path which our three companions had just quitted. Her face was covered with a veil, and there was nobody attending her.

A clumsy *fiacre*, of antique shape, came rolling heavily along the dusty avenue; it contained three men, whose immovable visages had attracted the regard of Champeaux and drawn from him the above exclamation.

Rapid as the passage of the young girl had been, she had had time to exchange a sign of the head with the three men in the carriage. Then the latter drew down the dingy red blinds, and the heavy vehicle, which looked like a shut up box, rolled on.

Our three friends exchanged looks, and the Chevalier de Noisy exclaimed:

“It was she!”

“Who’s she?” demanded at once Champeaux and Brocard.

“I tell you that these people are like nobody else in the world,” muttered Noisy, instead of replying.

And, as he spoke, he spurred his horse.

Behind the *fiacre*, which looked like a strayed caterpillar in the midst of a swarm of graceful butterflies, for they were as light and brilliant as butterflies, those equipages skimming over the ground, at the swinging trot of their beautiful horses, and bounding lightly upon their supple springs as though proud of their loads of women and flowers—behind the *fiacre*, came an elegant open *calèche*, which reaped on its passage an ample harvest of bows and smiles. It contained only a woman, very beautiful, in truth, but who seemed to have already passed the limits of youth. Her *calèche* bore upon its panels a fantastic and mournful escutcheon, which we may thus explain: sable, with *larmes de argent*, and was stamped with a comte's coronet. To judge by the attention which she excited, she must have been a lady *à la mode*. She had a toilet, at once simple and remark-

able, and her fair hair, the most beautiful hair you could imagine, surrounded a pale face, which wore a proud expression, though there were also visible some signs of fatigue, which might have spoken of suffering, but for the look of her large blue eyes, limpid and sparkling as those of a young girl. This woman bore a strange name : the Comtesse Torquati.

Upon the cushions by her side, reposed a book of prayers, with guilloched gold clasps.

She responded smilingly to the bows and smiles which came from all sides. Our three horsemen, following the example of the others, made profound inclinations as she passed. At that moment, another *calèche*, coming in the opposite direction, crossed the *fiacre*, and took the lower side of the avenue.

This one also contained a single woman, a woman to whom everybody again eagerly bowed. Her name has already come under

our pen; she was called the Marquise du Castellat. That about her which first struck the eye was a somewhat extravagant toilet, although not entirely overstepping the bounds of prudence, an *embonpoint* too decided, and pretensions suitable only for the age at which pretensions are tolerated, vague souvenirs of a beauty which had had its blossom and left for fruit a disagreeable superabundance of egotism.

When the two *calèches* met, the regard of the beautiful blond rested calmly and coldly upon the Marquise, who turned away her eyes.

Madame la Marquise did more: she began to caress a large dog, which lay upon the cushions beside her.

By some clumsiness on the part of the driver, or some caprice of the restive horses, the *fiacre* was turned round, so as to stand

right across the road. At the same time the *calèche* of the marquise had been obliged to back, and the two spirited horses of the Comtesse Torquati dashing forward into the too narrow space which remained between the *calèche* and the *fiacre*, our three horsemen were jammed up right in the centre of the block.

Horses and equipages were arriving each way, augmenting the crowd every moment ; the terrified marquise was already respiring the pungent odour from her flacon of salts, while the beautiful Comtesse Torquati remained leaning back upon the soft cushions, and seemed hardly to notice what was passing around her.

There was a moment when her extended arm might have passed in through the doorway of the *fiacre* as far as the elbow.

The red blind was raised a little, a hand

was placed on the door of the *fiacre*, and a voice from the interior said :

“To-night, the fifteenth of August !”

“Did you observe that ?” said Champeaux, when the *calèche*, disengaged from the block, dashed on over the sand of the avenue. “The old fogies inside there are fortunate : the Comtesse made them a sign of the head like the charming horsewoman who came across the road just now, and I almost believe the three fine fellows in the *fiacre* sent her some compliment under their ragged blind.”

“I am sure of it,” replied Brocard ; “they are ambassadors in disguise, or princes riding incognito. Noisy must have heard what they said, for he was between them and the comtesse.”

The chevalier followed with a thoughtful eye the *calèche*, which was retreating in the midst of a cloud of dust.

"I did not hear anything," he replied.

The circulation was re-established, and the strings of carriages on either side of the avenue, continued their course.

"*Bonjour, Stéphane!*" exclaimed Brocard, making a bow with his hand to a handsome young man, who sat with remarkable elegance the finest horse there was in the Bois.

He was one of those privileged dandies who know how to cure our fashion of their absurdities, one of those fortunate lads who bear their youth so bravely that the inventions of the tailor can take nothing from their native grace. His dress was pretty much the same as that of his colleagues, but he set off his clothes. You would have said, as he passed along, his light air waving in the breeze and a gay smile in his eyes and upon his lips, that he was the only gentleman there in the

midst of a crowd of shop-keepers in their Sunday clothes.

He gave his hand to the Baron Brocard and the Chevalier Noisy ; then he bowed to M. de Champeaux, with whom he was not acquainted.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I want you to help me out of a great difficulty. It is very fatiguing to do a thing you are not used to, and I was, for a wonder, engaged in reflecting profoundly."

"You, Stéphane!" exclaimed Brocard, with a laugh.

"And what may you have been reflecting upon, darling of fortune?" demanded the Chevalier Noisy, in a friendly tone.

Champeaux was studying the riding-coat and vest of the new comer.

"First of all, gentleman," continued Stéphane, "have you seen the drama they

are representing at the new theatre at the Porte-Saint-Martin, and which is called *Le Vampire*?"

Everybody had seen *Le Vampire*. In 1820 *Le Vampire* had a furious success.

When they had replied affirmatively to Stéphane's question, he put on a serious air, which became him extremely, as he cast an oblique glance towards the end of the avenue.

By chance the crowd was not so thick just at that moment. In the spot upon which the look of Stéphane rested, there was a large space entirely clear, and across that space a man was advancing slowly on horseback, his head bent down, and his hand resting idly upon his hip. Behind this man rode a negro lackey, who, before he left his native country, must have been the ugliest blackamoor in all the coast of Guinea.

Stéphane extended his hand towards this pair.

"Will you be good enough to look attentively at my illustrious friend, Gabriel de Feuillans and his familiar spirit, Congo?" said he, in a half jesting tone, under which could be observed a serious preoccupation.

"We are looking at him," returned Brocard;
"what then?"

"Don't you see anything extraordinary about him?"

"Nothing, except that he wears a black costume such as no person in France ever wore before him."

"The fact is," added Noisy, "that this Gabriel de Feuillans is a wonderful fellow. They say he puts his cravat on *à la diable*, and without thinking about it; look at that bow, how classic! It is said that he never sends a coat back to his tailor to be re-

touched ; yet look at the cut ! What style and what a fit ! Brummel, who studied that sort of thing, was only a child to him."

Stéphane shook his light curls.

"It is neither his cravat nor his coat that I ask you to look at, gentlemen," said he.

"What then?"

"I only wanted to know if you don't think like me that he resembles the Vampire at the Porte Saint Martin."

The Baron Brocard burst out laughing, and Noisy, whom you dared not call the "Sec," under the penalty of receiving a ball through your head, or a sword thrust in your chest—even Noisy gave way to a shout of laughter.

"If you don't think so," continued Stéphane, trying to laugh, "I am mad, there is no doubt of it. That devil of a Feuillans, with his negro, Congo, who is uglier than the seven capital sins, has produced upon me, for

some days past, an effect that is positively fantastic. I can't prevent myself from liking him. He attracts me; he seduces me; he fascinates me. And yet there is some mysterious voice within me which cries: 'Take care!'

"Absolutely just as in the drama of the 'Vampire,'" exclaimed Brocard.

Noisy was no longer laughing, but his regard was fixed upon Stéphane with curious interest.

"Are you speaking seriously?" he asked.

"Upon my honour," replied the young man, whose charming face was slightly contracted. "I try to make a jest of it, but I can't do it."

Gabriel de Feuillans was slowly approaching, followed by his black; and as Stéphane looked towards him again, each of his companions saw him shudder.

"It's stronger than I am," he added. "I don't know why I like him; but I know still less why I have this stupid idea that he is to be the death of me."

"Bah!" exclaimed Brocard.

The chevalier interrupted him, and pronounced, in a low voice, as he pressed the hand of Stéphane :

"I never laugh myself at things that I don't understand."

Champeaux ogled the passers-by, and Brocard whistled a stave of a popular tune.

Noisy looked Stéphane in the face, and said to him, lowering his voice still more :

"Take my advice, avoid Gabriel de Feuillans. And if one of those romantic adventures into which young men are too often led presents itself in your way, take my advice again, and fly from it."

Stéphane was in that frame of mind in

which one willingly listens to a warning. As he was about to reply, he saw the Baron Brocard exchange a bow with some one who was passing on the other side of the way, and he turned round involuntarily. That some-one was Gabriel de Feuillans in person.

It would have been very difficult to have told the precise age of M. de Feuillans, either by his face or his figure. Those who admired in him only the elegance of his dress, showed themselves, in truth, very sparing of praise. He was handsome; his carriage had something noble about it, he sat exceedingly well on horseback, and if you could not say that he was a young man, it was only on account of the firm and grave maturity which could be read upon his forehead; his fair hair, already a little thin and of extreme firmness, fell in curls lower than was in strict accord-

ance with the fashion, his large temples had, under the white skin, a sort of bluish tint, and a look of indifference covered his profound and piercing regard. I do not know whether he really bore any resemblance to the vampire of the Port Saint Martin ; but stage vampires have generally wickedly sarcastic mouths, and that of M. de Feuillans presented only calm and pure lines.

The Chevalier Noisy, who at that moment was examining him with attention, found in him another likeness. He was comparing his features with those of the charming young man Stéphane Gontier, whom he had just before called the darling of fortune ; and, apart certain differences, greater slenderness and paleness with M. de Feuillans, greater sharpness in the bony outlines, and also more height in the general design of the face ; and

in Stéphane, on the contrary, more grace, more harmony, and at the same time, greater physical energy, the Chevalier Noisy found numerous and striking affinities.

M. de Feuillans came up to our group and said, taking off his hat :

“Gentlemen, I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you at the Marquise’s to-night.”

Brocard and Noisy bowed, and Stéphane turned away his eyes.

M. de Feuillans passed on with a smile upon his lips; but before he had completely left the group, his regard met that of Stéphane, who had raised his eyes again as though in spite of himself.

“*A ce soir !*” said M. de Feuillans, in a sweet, and almost a caressing tone.

Stéphane reddened, and returned, in a low voice :

"A ce soir !"

M. de Noisy maintained later that he had seen the thick lips of Congo open, and show from one side to the other of his double range of wolf-like teeth.

However that might have been, at the moment when Congo, following his master, was lost among the crowd, a rosy-faced lad whom you might easily have taken for a girl in disguise, came dashing out of the bridle-path down which the horsewoman had disappeared some minutes before, and intrepidly traversed the crowd of equipages to overtake our four cavaliers.

Noisy was about to inquire of Stéphane if he had some particular rendezvous with M. de Feuillans for the evening. According to the response of the young man, the chevalier felt himself in a good disposition to preach,

when the rosy *garçon* came and planted himself in front of our cavaliers, and held out to Stéphane a tiny billet.

Stéphane took the paper.

The young groom smiled slyly, again crossed the avenue, and was lost among the trees.

CHAPTER III.

THE COMTESSE TORQUATI.

THE Baron Brocard, because he belonged to Paris, and M. de Champeaux, because he came from province, had the same thought and the same smile.

“A piece of fortune,” they both exclaimed, in the same breath.

“That’s something that will speak plainer than presentiments,” grumbled the Chevalier

de Noisy; "it is just in this way that all disastrous adventures begin."

Stéphane had changed colour on opening the note, and joy sparkled in his eyes.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, hastily.

And, without waiting to say more, he spurred his horse, which bounded forward; and, three seconds afterwards, he had disappeared round a turn in the drive.

"Now, you must take pity upon me at last," said Champeaux. "I come from Normandy, and the simplest things produce the same effect upon me as insoluble enigmas. Who is this Stéphane, and who is this Feuillans?"

Brocard and Noisy looked at each other as though they mutually wanted to shift on to each other's shoulders the task of replying to this double question.

"Whoever they may be," said Cham-

peaux, still under the influence of his admiration, "they have both deuced good figures."

"To explain to you in detail who Feuillans is," said the Chevalier de Noisy after a silence, "would take an interview of some hours; and then you would not know all that is said about him in society. In brief, Feuillans is a man of the first fashion, rich, as it appears, at present, and it is affirmed, expecting to receive a colossal fortune in a short time. It is not known exactly where he came from, but his company is much sought after. His name is one of those which are never disputed, because it sounds well in the ears of the profane, and is one which adepts frankly place in the regions of fancy. Some idle persons have taken the trouble to build a romance upon the mystery of his existence. He has a star, it is said, like Caesar and Napoleon. Somewhere over there, in Britany, I

don't know where, in the depths of some forgotten canton, full of phantasmagorias and wild legends, he has built a palace fit for the occupation of the fairies. Around this palace he does not possess an inch of land, but he is waiting for this gigantic fortune which his star is to bequeath to him to purchase twenty square leagues of land—"

"Is he out of his mind?" asked Champeaux, opening his eyes wide.

"No, he certainly is not."

"Is he a swindler?"

"Never repeat that word, unless you want to be torn in pieces by the prettiest hands in Paris."

"Then in what category—?" murmured Champeaux.

"He was the intimate friend of the late Marquis de Castellat, who was the friend of the king. He was to have married Laurence

de Treguern, who bore one of the first names in France, and was dame to the Dauphine. He is now going to marry Olympe de Treguern, who is the queen of beauty of our Parisian saloons, and whom the will of M. du Castellat made one of the richest heiresses in the world. That is all that is known positively ; nobody can tell you more than that."

"But his personal fortune?"

"He is assured in the *Campbell Life* for an enormous sum, and the assurance is arriving at its term."

Champeaux puffed out his cheeks with an air which meant to say :

"Oh ! *peste !*"

Then he demanded :

"And Stéphane?"

"Oh ! Stéphane !" exclaimed the Baron Brocard ; "that's quite another thing. Since we were speaking just now of the Vampire,

and supposing that Feuillans is a bit of a Vampire, Stéphane is the fair-complexioned youth, handsome as a girl's ideal, and possessed of an open and generous disposition, who comes in at the fifth act, and saves the victim on the brink of the precipice. He is killed very cruelly, this fair youth, two or three times, to fulfil the necessities of the intrigue, but he always revives, in order that virtue may be rewarded at the *dénouement*. During the last *soirée* at the Marquise's, I saw the eyes of the beautiful Olympe, the *fiancée* of Feuillans, fixed upon Stéphane.

"Baron," interrupted Noisy le Sec, with gravity, "I don't know how it is that all your wit sounds false in my ears to-day. There is some menace hanging over this young man. I can't go so far as to say that I know it, but I feel it."

"Well, chevalier, to please you, I will

close the flood-gates of my wit. Stéphane is a charming lad, and I like him as much as you do. I will conclude his history in two words then. It is some eighteen months since he arrived in Paris from Brittany. He brought with him the pretty face you know, and three or four hundreds of louis in his purse, a letter of introduction which he brought with him, gave him the entrance to the Hôtel du Castellet. I very well recollect seeing him standing in one corner of the *salon*, quiet and embarrassed, contemplating the lovely Olympe as the wise men of the east worshipped the stars of the firmament. One night, Olympe did not come to the ball of the Marquise, her aunt—a thing which often happens; and, I may say in passing, this beautiful Olympe is not the least striking of the mysteries of which the Hôtel du Castellet is full. Our Stéphane, deprived of

his star, went up to the gaming table (they play for very high stakes at the Hôtel du Castellat), and won, without at all expecting it, I don't know what fabulous sum. The next day, the losers demanded their revenge, which Stéphane gallantly granted; and he won twice as much as on the previous day. And mind, there is not a voice will dare to say that he is other than the fairest player, that is to say the boldest and most extravagant who ever touched the cards. It is remarked that he never plays except when Olympe is not present."

"After the revenge match, he found himself in a splendid hôtel in the Champs Elysées, with a well-filled stable, fifty thousand *écus* in his *secrétaire*, a well-ordered household, and the reputation of a little hero of romance, which gives him a place apart in our fashionable circles—there you have it."

The Baron Brocard uttered this last sentence by way of a final point, and our three cavaliers set off at a trot, bowing right and left, inhaling the dust by mouthfuls, in short, diverting themselves like true gentlemen.

It is certain that the ears of Stéphane Gontier did not tingle while he was thus being talked about. Stéphane had forgotten his three companions as completely as though he had not seen them for a century. He galloped like a madman up and down the rides to cool his burning forehead, laughing to himself, and had great difficulty in restraining the cries of joy which rose from his bosom.

He still held in his hand the tiny billet, which he had devoured at a single glance.

The billet said :

"I have returned. I shall go this evening on foot to the Rue du Bouloy. Wait for me

about eight o'clock in the Cour des Fontaines; I must speak to you."

Under the light and charming writing, there was the name of VALÉRIE.

And Stéphane galloped on, pressing the silky paper against his lips, laughing and crying, child that he was, and interrogating his watch every minute to hasten the flight of time.

Since Champeaux was in train to interrogate, he might, one would have thought, have asked who was that beautiful comtesse who bore an Italian name, but whose hair had certainly not taken its golden lustre beneath the ardent sun of Italy.

It was still something to be learnt, and the Comtesse Torquati was at least as well worth asking about as M. de Feuillans or little Stéphane.

Her *calèche* continued to follow the route

of Bagatelle. She made quite a sensation; everywhere, on her passage, you saw the women whisper; and if some provincial, more curious than Champeaux, inquired the history of this beautiful lady, proudly adorned in her simplicity, the response was always the same.

They said to the provincial—

“She is the sister-in-law of Madame du Castellat, and the widow of the last Treguern; she was married the second time to the Comte Torquati.”

“And the Comte Torquati?”

“Nobody has ever seen him.”

The gazer then observed the black horses, and the dismal coat-of-arms which was painted upon the panels of the *calèche*. He remarked also that the lady had a black ceinture over her white dress, and a jet collar, which contrasted with the dazzling whiteness of her neck.

Amidst all this elegance and brilliancy there was visible a slight appearance of mourning.

The Comtesse Torquati seemed not to pay much heed to the attention of which she was the object; she allowed herself to move *nonchalante* and graceful with the motions of the equipage; her eyes were half closed, and there was a thoughtful look upon her fine forehead.

At the moment when the horses were crossing the spot where several roads meet, a young groom, good-looking as a woman, whom we easily recognise as the same we have already seen deliver another message, came running towards her, and said—

“She is waiting for you before the fosses of the Muette.”

The Comtesse Torquati sprang upright on her cushions, and her large eyes sparkled as

she thanked the lad with a motion of her head.

“To the Muette; gallop!” she said hastily to the coachman.

The two black horses, touched by the whip, bounded forward, leaving the dust behind them in a long cloud along the drive, and the gazers had to find something else to look at, for the equipage of the Comtesse Torquati was soon no more than an indistinct spot in the perspective of the avenue.

It is well known that Parisian fashion never adopts more than a small corner at one time in the places which are devoted to pleasure. At the Tuilleries the Allée des Orangers is thronged while the magnificent bosquets are deserted. The Bois de Boulogne is much larger than the Tuilleries; there the world of fashion keeps itself within even narrower limits.

In 1820 the Allée de Longchamps bounded the empire of fashion, and nobody ever wandered to the south-west of the bois, because everybody knew that there they could promenade at their ease. The Muette was soon to have its reign ; but for the time it was as much separated from the spot favoured by the *mode* as Pezenas or Quimper-Corentin.

If the beautiful Comtesse Torquati had a fancy for wandering towards these outlandish latitudes, the crowd could not follow in her track. At the end of ten minutes the *calèche* of the Comtesse rolled over the gravel of a deserted drive. Without leaving the Bois de Boulogne, she was twenty leagues from Paris.

Through the slight foliage of the acacias she could see those rich clusters of flowers which border the fosses of the Muette.

A young lady dressed in a riding-habit,

whom we shall have no difficulty in recognising, galloped across the green sward, waving a handkerchief which she held in her hand, and entered the shade of the cluster of trees situated to the left of the enclosure of the Muette.

The Comtesse ordered the carriage to stop, and got down.

The footman inquired if he should follow Madame la Comtesse, and was answered no.

The Comtesse hastened towards the fosses, stopping for an instant to admire the flowery tufts, and then crossing the green with slow steps, entered the clump of trees in which the young lady had disappeared.

The moment after they might have been seen together, the Comtesse and the young girl, upon the green grass at the foot of a large tree. The Comtesse was sitting down;

the young lady was kneeling before her, holding up her smiling face to her kisses.

“Olympe! Olympe!” said the Comtesse, in a voice which trembled with emotion, “how I love you, and how long the hours have seemed during your absence.”

The young girl had thrown back the veil which had before covered her face, and now showed the exquisite beauty of her features. She appeared to be hardly twenty; she was dark, and the deep blue of her eyes seemed black when the half closed lids shaded them with their long lashes.

She was pale, and perhaps a little more serious than is usual at her age; but, under the slight melancholy of her countenance, it could be seen that joy was not dead. You could detect traces of the vivacity of youth, and could imagine that the least shock might

light up flashes in the enchanting languor of her regards.

She held the two hands of the Comtesse pressed against her lips.

"Look at me, that I may see how beautiful you are," murmured the latter, with tears in her eyes. "God has not willed that I should feel the joys of a mother; I, who live but for my children!"

"If you could see him," said the young girl, yielding happily to these caresses, "you would not accuse heaven."

"That is true. You have just come from Bretagne; you have seen him. Tell me about him at once; is he beautiful?"

"He is like you."

"Is he good?"

"I say he is like you; he has your face and your heart. He is good, simple, and

frank; he is brave as a lion if he sees an enemy before him, and the rustling of my dress makes him tremble at night; so many superstitious terrors have hovered over his cradle. He has so often heard the voices speaking under the Tour-de-Kervoz!"

"Will he be strong enough to bear his father's name?"

Olympe smiled.

"To-day," she replied, "he is only a poor little peasant; to-morrow, if you all wished it, he might be a chevalier."

The Comtesse rose, and placing her two hands upon the shoulders of the young girl, looked in her face.

"But you speak to me about him," she said, "as though there were no doubt or mystery. Are you quite sure that you know?"

"I am sure of it," said Olympe, casting down her eyes.

"And the other?" murmured the Comtesse.

A rosy tint came to the lovely cheeks of Olympe.

"The other is handsome," she said, lowering her voice; "and he is brave and good. You told me, mother, to passively obey the orders of the Comte, and I have done as you wished; but if the Comte ordered me to be the enemy of Stéphane, mother, I must disobey him."

The eyes of the Comtesse and those of the young girl encountered; the young girl did not look down again, but her eyes shone with a soft but indomitable firmness.

A word came to the lips of the Comtesse, but she did not utter it.

"Olympe," she said, turning the conversation, "the comte, the diamond merchant, and the doctor, are all three in Paris."

"I have seen them, mother."

"In the *fiacre*?"

"In the *fiacre*."

"Were they over there at the same time you were there?"

"Yes; then they went to Germany, somewhere near to Cologne."

"And what have you been doing during all the time that I have not seen you?"

"I have been obeying orders. On quitting Redon, I found, as had been announced to me, the Commander Malo, waiting for me upon the moor; and he conducted me to the house of an old woman named Marion Lecuyer. When he told her my name, she kissed my two hands and wept. But her intelligence, weakened by suffering,

betrayed her good will, and I could learn nothing from her, except that she had in the course of her life had the honour to be the god-mother of a Treguern. While I was talking to her, the Commander Malo whispered in my ear—"Make haste, for you will never see her again—the veil is there!"

"The veil!" repeated the Comtesse, with a shudder; "and the old woman died, did she not?"

"She died before the next morning."

The Comtesse passed the back of her hand across her brow.

"Marion Lecuyer," she murmured, "was the elder sister of a man who loved us well."

"Roland Montfort," interrupted Olympe.

The Comtesse looked at her in astonishment.

"I thought I had never spoken to you of that," she said.

"This Roland Montfort," continued Olympe, seeming to follow the course of her thoughts, "was accused of committing murder, on the night of August the 15th, 1800. I am searching for him; and if he has not rendered up his soul to God, I shall find him."

"But he was innocent!" exclaimed the Comtesse, who mistook the sense in which these words were spoken.

"Was he nothing more than innocent?" pronounced the young lady, in a low voice. "Great families should be grateful; I think you must remember all that Roland Monfort has done for the Treguerns."

The Comtesse remained silent for a moment, then she replied, casting down her eyes:

"I do remember it, my girl."

"My darling mother," exclaimed Olympe covering her hands with kisses, "I love you with my whole heart, and it is that which

reconciles me to my lot in life. I know how good and pious you are; and I know that you wish to stand between me and evil. But have you not a bandage over your eyes, dear Mother? Do you know the designs of those men in whose hands you have placed me as a docile instrument, mother?"

A shade passed over the brow of the comtesse.

"The ways of God are hidden, child," she murmured; "there are men charged by Providence to execute the decrees of justice."

Olympe shook her head.

"When Roland Montfort was accused of murder," she said, "there was a young advocate who generously defended him, when all the world had abandoned him. That advocate is getting old now, but he still remembers having once sworn that he would sound the bottom of this mystery before he died."

"Oh!" said the comtesse; "take care, Olympe, my poor child! You also are thirsting to know! You also want to sound the bottom of the mystery!"

"That is true, I do want to sound it," returned Olympe.

"And to arrive at that end, my girl, would you make yourself the auxiliary of the enemies of those to whom you owe all love and respect?"

"M. Privat has no hatred for anything but falsehood and crime," said Olympe, instead of replying.

"Then you have seen him also?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Have you spoken to him?"

"Often, and for a long time."

"Take care?" repeated the Comtesse, who had become pale; "words sometime strike

as mortally as the sword, and who knows where your blows may fall !”

Olympe looked as though she wished to penetrate the depths of her mother’s heart.

“The Comte Torquati is not my father, is he?” she inquired abruptly.

“No,” replied the Comtesse after a silence.

Then she added, leaning her head upon her hands:

“The child who really loves her mother never doubts her thus.”

Olympe threw herself upon her neck and burst into tears.

For some minutes there was nothing but tears and caresses ; then the Comtesse continued :

“And the register of births?”

“I went by night into Orlan Church,” replied Olympe, “and looked over the register

of births. At the date of the 16th of August, 1800, there was a page torn out."

The Comtesse clasped her hands upon her bosom.

"At the Mairie," pursued Olympe, "the only birth entered in the register on the 16th of August, in the same year is that of Stéphane-Marie-Gabriel Gontier, father and mother unknown."

The Comtesse made a gesture of impatience.

"What has he to do with us!" she said. "I have been told about the page being torn out before. Douairière le Brec must be very old, and repentance sometimes comes with age. If you had questioned her—"

"I have questioned Douairière le Brec. She will never repent because she does not believe in God. But it is not Douairière le Brec whom I accuse, mother. At that time

there was at the presbytère of Orlan, a man—”

“Gabriel !” interrupted the Comtesse.

“Gabriel !” repeated Olympe, with a flash of her eyes, “Gabriel whom your friends surround with a mysterious protection, Gabriel from whose path they clear all obstacles. Gabriel—M. de Feuillans ! to whom I shall very soon perhaps, be called upon to give my hand, if not my heart !”

The Comtesse placed her beautiful hand over Olympe’s mouth and rendered her dumb.

“Still rebellious,” she said, trying to smile, “would you do nothing for the hope of seeing the revival of the glory of your forefathers ? Can you not close your eyes and allow yourself to be guided by those who love you ? Just now, you said, and that weighs upon my heart, Olympe : ‘If they ordered me to be

the enemy of Stéphane, I should disobey. But, my child, if they answered: 'you must choose between this Stéphane and your brother?'"

"Why should I choose? They know each other and love each other with all their hearts."

"Answer me! If they were to say that?"

"I should reply: 'I will not choose.'"

"You would make that answer to the Comte Torquati?"

"Certainly, mother."

"And to me, if I were to say the same thing to you, what would you answer?"

The lips of Olympe half opened but she did not speak. She held down her head and hid her lovely face in her mother's bosom.

"Well?" persisted the latter, sadly fondling

the dark locks which were scattered over the young girl's forehead.

"If you told me to die," faltered Olympe, "I would ask for your last kiss and I would die."

"She loves him!" thought the Comtesse.

Suddenly Olympe raised her head.

"It is late," she said, "and I have to dress for the *fête* at the Marquise's. Have you nothing more to ask me, mother?"

"Nothing," replied the Comtesse. "I know all. *Au revoir*, Olympe, love me and think of me."

Olympe held her forehead to her mother's lips, and while the latter gave her a long kiss, she said:

"If you have nothing further to ask me, I have something more to tell you; mother, prepare to be happy, he whom you love best of anyone in the world is near you."

"He whom I love best in the world," repeated the Comtesse Torquati, trembling with emotion; "my son! my adored Tanne-guy!"

"In a few hours you will see him, mother."

Olympe escaped from the trembling arms of her mother, and a few minutes after was galloping along the road to Paris.

The servants of the Comtesse Torquati exchanged glances, when they saw her return to the carriage pale and still showing signs of emotion.

As for Olympe, a quarter of an hour later, you might have found her in a charming little boudoir, with a roguish looking young girl unfastening the spencer of her riding habit. This pretty lass resembled, feature for feature, the little groom who had delivered the tiny

billet to Stéphane, and who had sent the Comtesse Torquati to the fosses of the Château de la Muette.

The habit was taken off, and the graceful figure of Olympe was enveloped in a dark coloured dress. She had certainly not spoken the truth when she had spoken of dressing for the ball. A hat, covered with a veil, imprisoned her black locks.

"Vevette," she said; "in an hour I shall return. Have everything ready, my flowers, my dress, and my trinkets; we shall have just a quarter of an hour for my toilet."

Vevette shook her roguish head with a smile. Olympe went out by a small door which opened at the top of a flight of narrow and dark stairs, passed across the beautiful garden, worthy to surround the palace of a prince, and soon found herself all alone, under

the trees of the Champs Elysées, where it was beginning to grow dusk.

A hackney-coach was standing at the corner of the Avenue d'Antin, which Olympe entered as she said to the driver:

“Rue du Bouloy!”

CHAPTER IV.

ARRIVAL OF TANNEGUY IN PARIS.

A DILIGENCE, small and of poor appearance, entered, grazing the doorway, the yard of the Messageries de France, situated in the Rue du Bouloy. It was drawn by three horses, streaming with perspiration and covered with dust, and was composed of two compartments—the interior and the coupé.

The day was drawing to a close, but the evening was intensely hot.

While the three horses stood blowing as though they were half dead, upon the bare flags of the yard, the conductor descended from the inconvenient throne which he occupied under the awning, and reached the ground with a growl.

"Upset twice!" said he to the employés who approached the vehicle. "This old waggon is bewitched, that's certain. I would rather beg my bread than get upon it again."

The hostlers detached the horses, and the door of the coupé and that of the interior opened at the same moment.

From the door of the coupé came out a personage whose costume bore some resemblance to that of the monks of the Christian doctrine, and his face was so pale, long, and

gloomy, that the coachman felt a sort of shudder at the sight of him.

"When one has such characters as that in the coach—"

He did not conclude, for a servant in livery sprang forward to meet the traveller.

"*Bonjour*, monsieur le commander," said he, with an eagerness in which respect and fear were equally mingled. "Madame la marquise sent me here to attend you. Have you any luggage?"

He who was called the commander, and who had received the ambassador of the comtesse very coldly, pointed with his finger to three enormous square cases, which those who were unloading the coach had just placed upon the ground.

"I don't know whether we can put those in the *calèche*," objected the servant.

"Here's a gentleman who has more luggage than I!" exclaimed a youthful and gay voice from the door of the interior.

That voice belonged to a tall youth, who was shaking his travelling jacket which was covered with dust, and respiring the open air with long breaths.

As his eyes fell upon the commander, he started, and stood open-mouthed.

"Confound it!" he said to himself, as his countenance lost its good-humoured expression; "are these visions to follow me to the end of the world?"

He turned towards the interior of the diligence, from which a weak and shrill voice could be heard saying:

"It's ridiculous, a step as high as this!—lend me a hand a moment, M. Tanneguy."

M. Tanneguy was our fine youth, just arrived from his native village, where, it

appeared, he had had some lugubrious visions.

Any person who had heard the sharp voice coming from the interior would have said, for a certainty: "There is an old woman in there."

But that person would have been deceived, both in the age and the sex. A small dry hand emerged from the interior and rested upon the strong and rounded hand of Tanne-guy; then came a peaked cap of maroon cloth; and under the cap was a face about the size of your hand,—bony, angular, extremely red, and belonging to that class which popular humour characterizes by the name of "nut-cracker."

The little man who was proprietor of this face descended with caution the two steps of the coach, and shook himself in a lively manner as he reached the ground.

The servants of the Messageries looked at him as they had looked at the supposed lay-brother, and certainly the little man had something about him even more fantastical than the grave and meagre personage.

According to the general opinion, the diligence could not have done otherwise than have upset twice—once for the man in the black soutaine, and once for the living grimace, grinning under the large peak of his cap.

A singular thing was, that the tall personage of claustral appearance, who was attended by the valets of the marquise with a *calèche*, bowed first to the man with the peaked cap, and that the man with the peaked cap, whose mean dress was nearer to that of a rustic, merely returned a nod which was almost patronizing.

“ You know that gentleman there ?” whispered Tanneguy in his ear.

"Yes," replied the little man; "I know almost everybody, more or less. But you know that I am not fond of being questioned."

A question was just then pressing to Tanneguy's lips, but he was one of those brave lads who would face an army and yet are as bashful as young girls. Tanneguy did not *dare*.

"After all, the yard of the Messageries is almost in the country," he said to himself. "When I am once away from here, I shall be a hundred leagues from all my fancies. The nights of Paris, full of light and activity, can have no likeness to the gloomy nights among our moors, where so many ghosts are hovering upon the mists. In eight days I shall have forgotten the Tour-de-Kervoz, the Trou-de-la-Dette, and that old round chamber where I have nearly gone out of my mind. I shall only think of that celestial vision——"

"Do you mean to sleep here?" asked the shrill voice of the little man, which aroused him with a start.

For this tall Tanneguy was very apt to wander off into the land of dreams.

On turning round, he saw close to his travelling companion, a person who stood immovable, and who, at first sight, appeared to have his arms tightly folded across his chest. On looking more closely, he observed that the man really had no arms. A hook hung down before him at the end of a strap, which was fastened over his mutilated shoulders.

Tanneguy could not recollect ever having seen a more mournful face than that upon which he was then looking; it was like a block of sculptured granite.

"Oh! oh!" said Tanneguy, "some-one waiting for you also? I am the only person nobody comes to meet."

The Commander went away, followed by the comtesse's valet, and three ostlers carrying his square boxes; a fourth ostler remained with the man with the peaked cap to get out his box.

"Is there anything for you, monsieur?" enquired the man of Tanneguy.

Tanneguy raised the small bundle which he had upon the end of his stick, and the man went into the house whistling.

"Give me a hand," said the man with the peaked cap, without ceremony, pointing with one hand to his box and with the other to the man without arms; "we will load my beast of burden."

Tanneguy frowned, for the joke seemed to him cruel; but the armless man lost not a particle of his impassibility.

Tanneguy raised the box himself and placed it upon the hook, and the man

without arms immediately began to walk away.

"Wait!" said the small traveller, in a tone of military command.

The mutilated man stopped short, with one foot raised, in the middle of a step. The little man took advantage of the pause to give his hand to our tall youth.

"My young comrade," he said, "don't trouble yourself about this honest mule, he has carried a good many other burdens. The arms are no longer there, and the head is a little gone, but the trunk is solid. Now we two must wish each other good night. I have recognized only one fault in you upon the road, which is that you ask too many questions. In that way, you see, you learn nothing, because human nature delights in being contrary."

"If I had not questioned you then," inter-

rupted Tanneguy naïvely, "you would have told me the name of that young lady——"

"Perhaps," said the little man, with a low chuckle.

Tanneguy joined his hands and fixed upon him a look of supplication so eloquent, that the little man, in order not to show any weakness, turned away, and pulled down the peak of his cap.

The mutilated man took this for an order and took a step forward.

"Wait!" ordered the little man again.

He turned towards Tanneguy a fixed and piercing look, and in that look, our Breton thought he could read an expression of regret.

"Come," he exclaimed in his passionate desire to know, "I will go all the way home with you, if you will——"

"That is not your way, my lad," interrupted the man of the peaked cap.

"Do you know where I am going then?" asked Tanneguy, in surprise.

"It is a long way from my *quartier* to the Allée des Veuves," pronounced the little man, smiling behind his spectacles.

For we have forgotten to mention that he wore spectacles, round and as large as two six-livre pieces.

Tanneguy recoiled, as he had often done among the haunted moors of his native place, on seeing in the moonlight the shaggy head of a witch.

The smile of the little man lost its expression of raillery.

"Have you known this M. Stéphane long?" he asked.

"Why, by my patron," exclaimed Tanneguy, in an excited tone, "have I told you that I know Stéphane, then?"

At the name, thus twice uttered, the muti-

lated man opened his eyes wide and drew a long breath. Instead of answering Tanneguy, the little man continued, in a slow and grave voice,

“He liked you well enough to fulfil his promise. But who amongst us can say : ‘The present hour belongs to me?’ Stéphane was handsome, strong, and rich——”

The armless man seemed to understand now; at every word he gravely nodded his head, in token of approbation.

“You speak of him as though he were dead,” stammered the young Breton, turning pale.

“Dead !” repeated the mutilated man, like an echo.

“Hold your tongue !” said the small man.

Then he continued, without heeding the emotion which he had occasioned :

“Douairière le Brec has given you a note;

keep the words which Douairière le Brec has written as though they were very precious."

In the midst of the profound bewilderment which he experienced (for each word of his interlocutor contained some new mystery), Tanneguy saw the regard of the little man suddenly turned towards the other extremity of the yard. He followed it, and a loud cry almost escaped from his lips.

He had perceived, though only for a single moment, an elegant and slender female form. That form was known to him, or he thought it was; and he would have been ready to make good use of his fists upon any person who had dared to say that that form was not divine, marvellous, adorable, and in fact the most perfect that was to be found in the universe.

The young lady had passed round the

angle of the doorway and disappeared into the street before Tanneguy could see the face.

"It is she!" he exclaimed, grasping the arm of his travelling companion.

The latter shrugged his shoulders.

"I tell you that you made a sign of intelligence to her!" insisted the Breton, almost menacingly.

"Are you jealous of me?" demanded the little man, raising his cap, as though the better to show his ugly face.

Tanneguy had pulled him towards the doorway, and was eagerly gazing along the street. There were a number of persons passing along the pavements, but the divine form was nowhere visible.

The mutilated man had followed them step by step; he now advanced into the middle of the street to see further. A singular emo-

tion had replaced the apathy which had been painted on his face a few seconds before.

"Valérie!" he murmured, in a soft and tender voice; "La Morte!"

"Valérie!" repeated our Breton, who had heard nothing but the name.

The mutilated man looked at him, and his eye-lids quivered. The little man placed himself between them and grasped Tanne-guy's arm.

"Valérie, so be it!" he grumbled; "you know the name—much good may it do you!"

Then he added, in a sharp and sententious tone:

"In Paris you rarely find what you seek, but you often find what you do not seek. Perhaps, before long, you will call to mind what I say to you, comrade."

The Breton was no longer listening —

"Valérie! Valérie!" both his head and his heart were full of that name.

"Now that you are not asking me," continued the man of the peaked cap, drawing himself up to be the better heard, "I am going to tell you something. My name is M. Privat, recollect that. I am a briefless barrister, and I live in that six-story house in the Rue Saint Denis, opposite the Fontaine des Innocents. Above the garret there is a pigeon-house: the garrets and the pigeons belong to me. If you have need of advice (and you won't be long first), come and pay me a visit, comrade. You can see my pigeon-house a long way off. At any rate, we shall meet each other again, perhaps sooner than we think."

He lightly pressed Tanneguy's hand, and nudged his beast of burden, as he called the armless man, saying :

“ March ! ”

Tanneguy remained resting upon his stick open-mouthed. For a moment he had the idea of starting off in pursuit of the companion of his journey ; but the little man disappeared round the angle of the Rue Coquillière, and Tanneguy thought :

“ It would be in vain if I questioned him from now till to-morrow, he would tell me no more.”

Tanneguy did not know much of the world and had no pretension to the title of observer ; nevertheless, during the journey, he had learnt something of his companion. He had found him stubborn and contrary, good-humoured at certain times and under certain aspects, original moreover, original by nature, and also original by habit.

Up to the age of twenty Tanneguy had never lost sight of the loop-holed and ivy-

clad tower of Château le Brec, where he had been brought up by an old woman named Douairière le Brec, who was his grandmother. There had not been, properly speaking, any mystery in his life, but around his life all sorts of mysteries had been passing. Since the age of reason had opened his eyes he could not count the terrible, or perhaps only inexplicable things which constantly seemed to raise him out of the real world, and make a phantasmagoria of his existence.

After a single look at this handsome Tanneguy, with his long, black, clustering hair, his dark blue eyes full of softness and fire, you might have taken an oath that he was brave. And in truth, if he had a stout stick or a sword in his hand, Tanneguy cared for no living soul. But at night, when he was all alone, the tall Tanneguy very often had a cold sweat come over him, and his pale

lips trembled in spite of himself, at the thought of what he had seen upon the moor at Orlan, by the pale moonlight.

M. Privat, with his round spectacles and his peaked cap, had nothing about him which could very precisely recall the terrible poetry of the Breton nights, and yet Tanneguy had felt himself tremble on seeing him, as though the little man had brought with him into the diligence which was going to Paris, all the paraphernalia of Armoricaïne superstition.

M. Privat had not said a single word which had the most distant connection with the things of the other world, yet the heart of Tanneguy had experienced that oppression which had been in the habit of resting upon it when he had seen the pale rays of the moon shining through the crevices of the Tour-de-Kervoz.

The little man with the peaked cap had

taken his place inside the diligence about half way between Britany and Paris. Tanneguy did not know him; but the vague terrors of his youth, from which he was flying and which he had already succeeded in forgetting in a new atmosphere, now once more made his flesh creep. When this unknown arrived it seemed as though his native village had entered the coach in his person. The mere sight of him made Tanneguy fancy that he could hear the moaning of the wind upon the moors and see the witches dancing round the Pierres Plantées, and the Treguern meadows once more came before his eyes with their willows, under which he had once seen three black men stalking along in the darkness, under whose feet the earth had seemed to open.

Why was this? Because at the moment when M. Privat closed the door of the dili-

gence, the face of a young girl had come in sight. Among all the terrible visions which darkened Tanneguy's memory, he had one vision which was radiant and very dear. The young girl had appeared only for a moment, but that moment was sufficient to make the heart of our young Breton beat as though it would leap from his bosom.

This delightful vision also belonged to his native place; for him she had no name, but the good people of Orlan called her *La Morte*.

The young girl gave her hand to M. Privat, and uttered only four words; but a strange event had stamped those four words in letters of fire upon the memory of Tanneguy.

Those four words evoked within him a whole world of terrors.

And yet they were very simple. As she touched the hand of M. Privat, the young girl had said:

"The fifteenth of August!"

This took place some leagues from the town of Laval. At that time it took two long days to travel from Laval to Paris.

During these forty-eight hours, Tanneguy had questioned in vain; he could not obtain from M. Privat either the name of the young girl or the mysterious meaning of the date.

Now, the name had by chance escaped the lips of the poor being who had no arms, and whom M. Privat called his mule; but the date?

Tanneguy remained three good minutes, planted like a post before the door of the Messageries, looking at the corner of the Rue Coquillière.

At the end of three minutes, a dandy ran against him, and Tanneguy, rousing himself, earnestly asked his pardon. The dandy ostensibly dusted his sleeve, as though the contact

of our young lad had soiled his coat; then, seeing that the other was not angry, the fop began to feel war-like, and made an insulting gesture as he muttered the word "rustic."

Even this did not make Tanneguy lose his temper, but he coolly put the dandy in the gutter; after which he walked on down the Rue du Bouloy with a swaggering air.

From that moment, he began to feel at home, and he was really delighted at the appearance of the Palais Royal.

By this time, the fogs of Britany were entirely dissipated. How was it possible to retain gloomy thoughts amidst those dazzling lights which shone upon, so much gold, so many joyous people, so many flowers, and so many smiles?

"Oh!" said he, gazing around him wonderingly, "I have seen a good many candles at the midnight masses in Orlan church; but

there were not half so many as there are here, I am sure ! Hurrah ! this is a good beginning. This is what I call amusement !”

He put his hat on one side, without giving himself any trouble about the people who were staring at him, and plunged into the thickest of the crowd with which the galleries were thronged.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIFTEENTH OF AUGUST—THE ALLÉE DES VEUVES.

THE excited and clamorous crowd were moving to and fro in the garden and along the open corridors. It was then the reign of the Palais Royal, an immense laboratory in which exorbitant cupidity heated the Parisian vices to white heat, in order to extract gold from them. It was not necessary to come straight from the moors of Morbihan, like our Tanne-

guy, to be dazzled by the aspect of this temple of easy and voluptuous pleasures and coarse intoxications.

The Palais Royal was the unique marvel of the world. At that inexhaustible fountain, all parts of the universe, including Carpentras and Pontoise, came to drink poisons without ever being able to quench their thirst.

Now that the Palais-Royal is defunct and that ennui, like a dead sea, rests over its abandoned lupanars, the present generation is tempted to place in the rank of fables the glittering *épopée* of those orgies ; we cannot believe that such extravagant debauches could have existed, we stand horrified before such unbounded license. But under those dull cloisters, into which the provincial sometimes wanders, inhaling the odour of restaurants at forty sous, you may still encounter some old vaudevilliste, an invalid of

the wars of the cellar, whose idiotic and at the same time glistening eye retains a reflex of those joys.

And further on, under the peristyle, where the rays of the sun never penetrate, some friend of the past has a collection of lewd prints hidden away. In the good old times such prints were sold openly !

Tanneguy, however, with laughing eyes and half-open mouth, only saw in all this brilliantly-dressed young women, laughing and singing under the illumined trees. His ignorance concealed from him the hideous reverse of the medal. He walked up and down, heartily admiring everything, and never suspecting that there was the least harm in this exciting scene.

Tanneguy was near twenty years of age; he was not quite sure whether the old mis-

tress of Château-le-Brec, dry and rigid in her nun's cap, was really his grandmother. At the bourg of Orleans the villagers called him sometimes Tanneguy le Brec, sometimes the *petit Monsieur*. Why this last name if he was the son of a farmer? He had not been backward in asking questions upon the subject, but the good people of the bourg of Orlan knew very little more about him than he knew himself.

Douairière le Brec, moreover, was not like one villager in a dozen; she wore silk and fine merino dresses, and Tanneguy himself had never been clothed like the companions of his youth. Certainly, in the midst of the Palais-Royal, surrounded by exquisites, decked out in their gewgaws, their fingers thrust into the pockets of their pantaloons, their hair frizzled, their whiskers curled, and enormous

eye-glasses suspended round their neck, Tanneguy could not pass for a fashionable; but that was so much the better for him.

He had loose brown-holland pantaloons, with well-laced gaiters to match; a velvet jacket, fitting close to his graceful and robust figure; a blue cashmere cravat, embroidered at the ends, over which fell his white turn-down linen collar; and a wide-brimmed straw hat placed on one side of his fine head of hair. And I assure you that that costume worn by Tanneguy was quite equal to the toilets of the gaudy fops by whom he was surrounded.

The largest mirror at the Château-le-Brec was not more than half a foot square; Tanneguy therefore stopped before one of the glasses which decorated the front of the café de Valois, and was pleased to look at himself thus, from head to foot. He found that he

was a good height and well built, and he held up his head with a feeling of pride, as for the first time he applied to himself the words which he had several times heard whispered close to him during the last ten minutes :

“ My dear, what a handsome young man ! ”

Without the hospitable glass which had placed him on such good terms with himself he would never have thought of taking to himself those flattering exclamations.

Since he had taken them to himself his modesty was aroused, and in his *naïve* embarrassment, he did not dare again to look in the glass which made him appear so handsome, or at the young damsels covered with diamonds and pearls who had the good taste to admire him.

He thought—“ What would they say if they saw my brother Stéphane ? ”

He continued his walk with his eyes pensively cast down, for the name of Stéphane had turned the current of his thoughts; it was the best and dearest of his recollections.

When Tanneguy turned his thoughts towards his sad childhood, mingled, as it was, with fantastic terrors, he found nothing bright or pleasant for them to rest upon, except two rosy faces crowned with fair locks of hair: the frank and friendly face of Stéphane, who had said adieu to him one day, calling him his brother, and the sweet face of Marcelle.

Alas! Marcelle! Tanneguy felt a weight upon his heart as he thought of that poor girl. As he was taking his departure Marcelle had whispered in his ear: "If you loved me, Tanneguy, you would not go so far away from me."

And Tanneguy had kissed her with tears in

his eyes; but he had left her all alone in the road nevertheless.

Tanneguy would never have done that before he had seen the vision which had so turned his head—that beautiful, that mysterious young girl whose name he had only just now learned, Valérie.

Poor Marcelle!

Stéphane, on the contrary, was a bright and joyous *souvenir*, without any mixture of remorse or melancholy. Stéphane was, like Tanneguy, an orphan; he had been brought up at Guillaume Féru's mill, and was liked by everybody in the village.

There is some mysterious attraction which draws those who have no relations towards Paris. At times Stéphane had received a little money from some unknown hand; and one fine morning he set out for Paris.

"If I make my fortune," said he to his friend Tanneguy, "you shall be rich."

Now, some months after, Tanneguy had received a letter from Stéphane—a letter containing these words:—

"I am rich at last; come and live with me; I don't want to enjoy it all by myself."

And behold, when he received this letter, Tanneguy was just about to pack up his little bundle to leave Chatéau-le-Brec, because a strange piece of folly had taken possession of his brain.

All who have travelled through a marshy country during a spring night know that Will-o'-the-Wisps are spirits. You may be as sober and as cool as you like, when the Will-o'-the-Wisp appears in the distance, among the leaves, you must run after it—you must follow. You may resist; but the spirit leads you on and on against your will. Far

out of the beaten road, through the wet grass, through mud and water, you go, faster and faster, but never getting a yard nearer to the object of pursuit.

Tanneguy was packing up his bundle to follow that other Will-o'-the-Wisp which leads young hearts astray. Tanneguy had seen Valérie, the young girl whom the simple folks of Orlan called *La Morte*, with her angelic face pale and lovely as a marble statue.

More than once the moon-beams had shown him, under the drooping willows which bordered the road to the manor-house of Treguern, an aerial form in a white dress, which almost seemed to float upon the breeze.

Then Orlan had become a desert for Tanneguy because the celestial figure had suddenly disappeared.

So Tanneguy was packing his bundle—foolish boy that he was—to travel through



the world, like the knights of the middle ages, in search of his lady love.

Douairière le Brec had said to him: "If you like to remain here, you can remain; if you want to go, go."

All the twenty years that he had lived with her Tanneguy had never once seen a smile upon the impassable visage of the old woman.

He called her grandmother, and yet when he searched the bottom of his heart, he could not find there a particle of filial love. He so young, so good, so susceptible of affection!

At his departure, when the people of the farm came to bid him adieu, Douairière le Brec harshly drove them away, and as Marcelle cried she threatened her with her stick.

"Why are you all so fond of him?" she

exclaimed. "Which of you will weep when I die?"

When she was left alone with Tanneguy she put ten pieces of gold into his hand and a sealed letter, which bore the address of the Marquise du Castellat, in the Allée des Veuves, at Paris.

"If you should return I shall not send you away," she said, as she pointed to the door; "if you don't come back, so much the better."

That was all that passed, and Tanneguy set out with his small bundle upon the end of his stick. He only looked back once, in the middle of the moor, to see the Tour-de-Kervoz for the last time, as its rugged battlements towered up above the tall willows. He felt a sinking at his heart, and tears came into his eyes as he waved his hand to Marcelle who was standing in the distance looking

after him. Then he strode along with determined steps, giving his long locks of hair to the wind, as though to greet the boundless road and the unknown future. Adieu, Marcelle !

His heart cried : " You are on her track. You will find her—the other—the Will-o'-the-Wisp."

Now, during the four days since he had left the Château-le-Brec, adventures seemed to be following his steps, and his good luck had twice shown him the person whom he was seeking.

She was in Paris ! Paris, the grand and the beautiful, and Tanneguy no longer felt the sadness of being absent from home, for something told him that this lovely young girl and he had the same destiny, and that fate would in some way bring them together.

As he thought thus, Tanneguy had crossed

the garden and found himself before the Montpensier Arcade. At that moment he heard a voice in the crowd, which made him start. The voice had said:

“Look! there he is.”

. Tanneguy uttered a cry of joy as he turned round, for he felt sure that he had recognised Stéphane's voice; he looked before him and behind, right and left, but could only see strange faces. Three of those faces, grouped together under the arcade which was opposite to him, seemed to be watching him attentively.

Tanneguy saw them very imperfectly, and could not distinguish their features, because the lights which were behind them dazzled his eyes, and yet a shiver ran through his veins.

“The three *Freux*!” he muttered; “can they have left the Tour-de-Kervoz, then?”

In spite of himself he cast down his eyes, and when he raised them again towards the arcade the opening of which had formed a frame round the three unknown figures, the arcade was empty.

Tanneguy sprang towards the gallery, for he was ashamed of the momentary terror which had left a chill in his veins. Superstitious terrors were quite out of place in the Palais Royal, full of excitement, noise, and light. Tanneguy expected to find behind the columns of the arcade the three men, who he knew could not be far away; he had no idea what he should say or do to them, but the opportunity seemed a good one, and his instinct commanded him to seize it.

It appeared the phantoms of Britany, on coming to Paris, did not lose the faculty of sinking into the ground according to their pleasure; for, after searching the corridors

for some time, our young friend could find nobody but smart damsels, gallant cavaliers, and provincials in quest of *bonne fortunes*.

He was at length almost persuaded to believe that his imagination had deceived him, and that it was all fancy. But if it was so, the fancy continued; for just as he was trying to dismiss the subject from his mind, feeling almost angry at his own folly, he distinctly heard the three syllables of his name uttered close to his ear.

He stopped as though an iron hand had grasped him by the collar, and the people who were passing paused in astonishment to see this good-looking youth planted like a post in the centre of the corridor, his eye fixed, his cheeks pale, and his head between his shoulders, as though he had been struck by a thunderbolt.

In order to account for the amazement of

our young Breton, we should mention an incident which had taken place some time previous to his quitting his native village.

Between the Malestroit road and Château-le-Beck there was a meadow, planted with trees, which was called the Treguern meadow, —“ *Il y revient.*”^{*} One night, as Tanneguy was returning home, he saw among the willows the three men of the Tour-de-Kervoz — “the Freux.”

In order to reach the farm-house, he had to pass by the place where they were standing. As he was approaching them, trembling all over, the three Freux disappeared into the ground; and at the same moment a sweet voice called Tanneguy by his name.

The Treguern meadow extended down to the side of the river, and as Tanneguy turned

^{*} This expression is used in Morbihan and Ile-et-Vilaine, to say that the place is frequented by the spirits of the other world.

round, he saw a white figure kneeling down near the edge of the water. He had already many times heard of La Morte.

The beams of the moon, which was passing between two clouds, fell directly upon the face of the young girl, and Tanneguy felt his heart leap into his mouth.

To-day, as then, in the crowded Palais-Royal, as in the lonely Treguern meadow, they had shown themselves to disappear in this strange manner; and on both occasions Tanneguy had heard a sweet voice pronounce his name.

He knew that Valérie was there, and when he turned his head, it was with the certainty of seeing the celestial vision.

He was not altogether deceived; nevertheless, we must say that visions lose something of their poetry in the capital of the civilized world. Instead of the white Undine whom he

had so much admired as he saw her kneeling on the brink of the water, he caught through the crowd a glimpse of a straw hat, from under which a profusion of hair streamed down in beautiful curls; a black mantle concealed the figure of the sylph, whose face disappeared entirely beneath the broad brim of her hat.

She had hold of the arm of a tall young man, who had a handsome face and a finely-formed head, covered with long fine hair.

"Stéphane!" cried Tanneguy, extending his hand towards them.

The young couple were entering one of the narrow passages which conducted from the gallery to the Rue Montpensier.

Tanneguy hurried into the passage like a madman, for a new feeling had sprung up within his mind. He began to be jealous.

The passage was empty already when he

reached it, but Tanneguy could still hear as it were the echo of the last words uttered at the corner of the street. Those words were: "The fifteenth of August, the Allée des Veuves."

He ran across the Rue de Montpensier, mounted the steps of the Rue Richelieu, and reached the pavement just in time to see two horses drawing an elegant closed carriage set off at a gallop.

Tanneguy had good legs, and as he felt convinced that the voiture contained those whom he was seeking, he determined to follow it.

The vehicle went at full speed along the Rue Saint Honoré, and all Tanneguy could do was barely to keep it in sight.

After running about three-quarters of a league, he saw the voiture stop somewhere in the quarters of the Pépinière, before an hôtel

of good appearance ; he made a last effort, and approached the door, quite out of breath, at the moment when a servant in livery was lowering the steps of the vehicle. His whole soul was in his eyes as he watched the door open. The next instant he saw a stout lady, carrying a long-haired dog in her arms, get out.

Tanneguy almost fell backwards ; the first thought that came to him was that some diabolical transformation had taken place. The stout dame was Stéphanie, perhaps ; and the long-haired dog the mysterious young lady of the willows.

While he was wiping the perspiration from his streaming forehead, the stout lady said to the footman :

“ The Allée des Veuves ! M. de Feuillans will bring me back.”

The door of the hôtel closed upon the hairy

dog and his mistress, and the vehicle went away at a sharp trot.

"Allée des Veuves!" repeated our young Breton, endeavouring to place his thoughts in order; "I have heard that before."

Then, after reflecting for a moment, he added:

"It is there that I have to take Douairière le Brec's letter.

Mechanically, he fixed his regard upon the walls of the hôtel; upon the walls of the hôtel there was a quantity of theatre placards.

Tanneguy saw nothing at first, but his eyes, fixed unknown to himself upon ten or twelve sheets of paper, at length began to make out the letters, and suddenly the same date, printed at the head of all the placards, attracted his attention:

"Fifteenth of August! Fifteenth of August! Fifteenth of August!"

Every theatre had posted up a showy placard for the day of the assumption ; but Tanneguy was ignorant of the custom of the theatres, and this date, which met his eyes on all sides, made him feel a sort of giddiness.

Tanneguy inquired the way to the Allée des Veuves of a person who was passing, and continued his route.

Half an hour later he found himself wandering among the trees in the Champs Elysées. He had passed the entrance to the Allée des Veuves without knowing it, and was now in the bosquets, near the Cours-la-Reine.

After nightfall, the place was at that time entirely deserted. It was quite different from what it is to-day ; neither the English gardens, the cafés chantants, the panorama, nor the houses of the quartier François I. were there then, and the Allée d'Antin itself

was only an avenue of trees, bordered by gardens and villas.

Along the Cours-la-Reine and in the Avenue de l'Etoile a few smoky lamps were placed here and there, seeming to increase the profound darkness which reigned under the trees.

Tanneguy walked on with rapid steps, feeling a feverish excitement in the darkness, which acted upon him in a singular manner.

Even in the middle of this vast Paris, with eight hundred thousand human beings respiring around him, he felt a cold shudder running through his being as he had formerly done at times when he had heard the sound of his own footsteps upon the solitary moors, and at times when he had felt himself bathed in cold perspiration in his bed as he heard, through the thick walls of Château le Brec,

those three supernatural voices which seemed to rise from under the Tour-de-Kervoz, talking of passed murder, and of future vengeance.

All at once he stopped, almost stunned with amazement.

"This is the fifteenth of August," said a voice in the darkness.

"And the day has only two more hours to last," added another voice.

A third voice continued :

"The money must be in the hands of the Englishman before midnight."

Tanneguy knew each of those voices.

The nocturnal terrors of his childhood seemed to be following his steps.

He vainly tried to penetrate the darkness.

"The Englishman shall have the sum," continued the first voice, "for the boy must be wealthy as a prince!"

"He will have the sum at the price of murder!" went on the second voice.

"As always," muttered the third.

Tanneguy thought he could see some confused objects moving in the darkness.

And almost at the same instant that mysterious voice, which seemed to come from heaven to announce the presence of an angel, sounded in his ear; he heard his name pronounced almost in a whisper—

"Tanneguy! Tanneguy!"

A woman was running along the neighbouring allée; her head was bare, and her long hair was fluttering in the wind. Did his ears deceive him, or did the young girl whisper:

"Come!"

He thought he heard the word, and fancied that the voice which uttered it faltered with emotion.

Tanneguy made an effort to follow her, but his legs were shaking so violently that he could hardly take a step without staggering as though he was about to fall.

The young girl disappeared into a sort of obscure alley, which opened out of the Avenue d'Antin, a little above the entrance of the Rue Jean-Gougon, and there Tanneguy lost sight of her; he nevertheless followed her into the alley, which was tortuous, and bordered on either side by gardens.

He seemed still to hear a sort of echo repeating :

"Come! come! Tanneguy! Tanneguy!"

And at the same time a brisk and lively tune being played behind the lilac bushes in the distance caught his ear.

The alley wound round; as Tanneguy advanced he saw lights before him, and the

next moment he perceived a brilliant glare streaming through the branches of the trees.

He was now much nearer to the music.

Presently his eyes fell upon a flight of steps, upon which a flood of light was falling; the music was close at hand, behind a wall, playing a waltz, and mingled with the music, the young Breton could hear bursts of laughter and joyous voices in conversation.

The place in which Tanneguy found himself was a sort of triangle, in which the alley ended. One side of the triangle, without any apparent issue, was formed by a garden-wall, covered with lamps and *pots-à-feu*; this wall supported a terrace, which was deserted at that moment, as all the company were engaged in the dance. The second side of the triangle was the entrance to the alley. The third side was formed by iron rails, furnished with sun-

blinds, with double doors in the centre, which were shut.

Behind this enclosure, by the light of the lamps, a handsome villa could be seen.

But Tanneguy hardly noticed all this. Where was the young lady ?

There seemed to be no issue. Which way could she have got out.

Tanneguy carefully examined the wall of the garden and the door in the iron rails.

That was the only way by which the young girl could have disappeared.

As Tanneguy had his eyes turned in that direction, he saw the door slowly open, and a man appeared upon the threshold, with his back turned towards our young Breton. Was this another dream ? There seemed to be a powerful black hand clutching this man by the throat. Presently the hand relaxed its grasp, and was suddenly withdrawn ; then

the door closed again, and the man fell backwards like an inert mass into the triangular space in which Tanneguy was standing.

In his fall, the cloak which had been placed so as to hide his features was disarranged, and the lights upon the wall shone full upon a face around which a profusion of fair locks fell in disorder. He was a handsome youth, who seemed to be very little more than twenty years of age.

"Stéphane! my brother Stéphane!" cried Tanneguy, his knees knocking one against the other.

He sprang forward, and placing his hand upon the heart of his friend, drew it back stained with blood.

He stifled a cry of horror which rose to his lips.

In the neighbouring garden, the thousand noises of the fête: gay voices, loud peals of

laughter, and sweet harmonies, rose upon the night air in strange discord with the feelings of horror which filled the mind of Tanneguy.

He felt that his reason was yielding to the shock, and made a supreme effort to retain his consciousness ; but a film passed over his eyes, and he fell senseless by the side of the inanimate body of Stéphane.

CHAPTER VI.

STORIES AND TRADITIONS.

THEY believed in ghosts in the circle of Madame la Marquise du Castellat.

It was in the year 1820, when the nobility were somewhat inclined towards the growing liberalism. The marquise was an enthusiast of the new liberal ideas, and the king of her *salons*, the lion of her fêtes, M. Gabriel Feuil-lans, was a free thinker, almost an atheist ; but he believed in ghosts.

This handsome Gabriel de Feuillans was worshipped in the circle of madame la marquise ; they imitated his dress and his manners, they adopted his opinions ; in their fondness for him they willingly carried their scepticism to the denial of a god ; but they believed in ghosts.

It was the fashion.

The Marquise du Castellaat occupied an isolated house, of melancholy aspect, situated in the Allée des Veuves, near the present position of the Rue Bayard. The house did not face upon the Allée des Veuves, but was situated between two gardens, the first of which served as a court-yard. A row of gilded iron rails ran along the front, on each side of an entrance gate, in the style of Louis XV., the pilasters of which supported lions and globes. Between the entrance-gate and the hotel was a labyrinth, in the intricate

paths of which some statues, placed here and there, seemed to be playing at hide-and-seek behind the shrubs. The hotel itself was also in the style of Louis XV., but bare and unornamented, and there was something cold and gloomy in the aspect of this large dull house, standing all alone, in the midst of old trees, and presenting to the view its closed windows.

On the other side of the house an immense parterre extended, joining some clusters of trees planted à la Française, round the extremity of which ran a vast green-house. Then, around the green-house, came shady walks, ruins (copied from the paintings of Watteau), and grottos covered all over with moss and full of mystery, which had been formed in the good old times of the *Art d'Aimer*, as children make nests of grass and down in the spring, to tempt the amour of wandering birds.

The whole terminated in a terrace which overlooked the unfrequented triangular place in which had taken place the catastrophe which ended our last chapter.

There were very brilliant fêtes at the Hôtel du Castella, especially during the summer season, and fashion had adopted these fêtes. The marquise (and this was not the least part of her glory) passed for the intimate confidant of Gabriel de Feuillans, the man at once so sparkling and so serious, profound, yet fascinating to the highest degree, who had the halo of Lafayette, the talisman of Don Juan, and whose happy fortune was soon to make him more wealthy than a prince in a fairy tale.

But, notwithstanding the splendour of the marquise's fêtes, and the vogue into which M. de Feuillans had brought her salons, there rested over this house a strange air of sadness.

It was a time of fancies, and ærial things ; Lamartine was tuning his melancholy lyre, Châteaubriand was singing of Gaul, the pale son of Ossian, and Byron was painting up on a cloud the phantom of the Giaour.

Many thought, and some even said with a laugh, that a pall seemed constantly to hang over the dwelling.

It must be acknowledged that chance had afforded ample occasion for these rumours, for a season never passed without some tragedy entering the house of the Marquise, by one door or the other, to interrupt its pleasures.

There was no lack of stories—the younger sister of the Marquise, Lawrence de Treguern, had died suddenly, a week before the 22nd of August, 1817, the day fixed for her marriage with Gabriel de Feuillans. The Marquis du Castellat, it was said, had placed in the

corbeille some diamonds which had been valued at more than a hundred thousand francs, and which had never been found since.

Strange details were related respecting the end of the Marquis du Castellat himself. That old gentleman had been on very friendly terms with M. de Feuillans. One evening in the year which followed the death of Laurence, and the disappearance of the diamonds—it was the 15th of August—the Marquis had the house turned upside down, as a considerable robbery had been committed, to his prejudice.

During the search, he was heard to repeat at different times—"I know the culprit."

The next day the Marquis had the horses put to at an early hour, and ordered the coachman to drive to a court of justice, in order that he might make his deposition; but he was struck with apoplexy on the way.

There were many other tales about the Hôtel du Castella. Upon so rich a foundation the gossip-mongers could not fail to enlarge; and they mingled with the modern stories chronicles of past times. The first Marquis du Castella, who had built the hôtel in the time of Louis XV., had been the son-in-law to a very rich capitalist, and had led a gay life. A certain pavilion, which flanked the extremity of the gardens, between the situations which are now occupied by the place François I. and the Cours-la-Reine, had been a sort of little *Parc-aux-Cerfs*. In this part of the grounds, there were one or more secret passages, of which everybody spoke by tradition, but which nobody had seen. It was supposed that one of these issues at least opened upon the grotto, and through there, it was said, the daughter of the capitalist, carried away from her family by violence,

had been borne to the house of her husband for the first time.

The present Marquise belonged to that ancient race of Treguerns, whose name has so many times appeared in these pages. If there was a shade of mystery in Paris upon the Hôtel du Castellat and its inhabitants, it was nothing to what existed respecting the Château de Treguern in Brittany. All the country people between Vannes and Roche-Bernard knew the legends which were abroad respecting the Manor-House.

It is not rare to see these chivalrous houses entirely lose their origin in fairy-land. All the world knows about the siren of Lusignan and the goblin of Rieux. The supernatural ideas which the name of Treguern awakened in the minds of the peasants of Morbihan were of a less graceful nature. It was not a capricious fairy who wandered through the

rooms in the Manor-House, or a shadowy imp which hovered at midnight over the large pond which lay below the Château—it was the terrible restlessness of the dead who could not sleep in their coffins; it was that fatal second sight which allowed the members of that remarkable family to read the death hour upon the dial-plate of the future.

There was no marble heavy enough to keep a Treguern in his grave; and every Treguern had the fatal gift of being able to see death gliding behind his unsuspecting victim.

In the ball-room and at church, in the forest when the merry horn awakened the echoes in the glades, around the festive table, and even in the quiet retreat of the chimney-corner, when the aged were recalling the bright dreams of youth, and the young were picturing gilded visions of the future.

That was well known, and many a strong man had trembled when the eyes of a Treguern fell upon him.

And it was a strange thing, the manner in which this second sight operated. When a Treguern found himself face to face with a person who was about to die, he saw a black veil, spotted with white tears, stretched between the two.

This extraordinary fact was, in a manner, perpetuated by the panels of the Treguern escutcheon, an escutcheon so gloomy that the Marquise du Castellat had declined to add it to the coat-of-arms of her late husband, either upon her seal or her equipages.

The Madre de Treguern bore *sable semé de larmes d'argent*, "which is the *drap mortuaire*," adds Pontivy's book of heraldry.

At the Hôtel du Castellat there was an old man of eccentric habits, who was thought to

be not quite right in his mind, and who was the last male of the name of Treguern.

It was the Commander Malo, whom we have seen arrive from Britany in the same *voiture* with Tanneguy and M. Privat, bringing with him those three large cases.

Certain persons regarded the Commander Malo as an insane person of the inoffensive and melancholy class; to others the Commander Malo was an object of fear.

He devoted much of his time to the study of the supernatural; he knew how to work charms and perform exorcisms, and possessed one of the largest libraries upon conjuration and witchcraft in France.

He had travelled a great deal. Hungary, Moravia, Silesia, and Poland had revealed to him their vampires. He had visited the cemetery of Kadam, in Bohemia, where they are obliged to chain down the corpses to prevent

them from wandering forth among the living; and at Belgrade he had seen the cock's eggs which contained serpents. Chiromancy, alectromancy, hydromancy, and divination by silver, were all familiar to him. He knew everything, he had seen everything, and he said that he had never seen anything equal to the night of All Saints, passed in a churchyard in Britany.

On his travels he had made a collection of talismans, fragments of tomb-stones, human bones, books on magic, and written charms. The apartments which he occupied in the Hôtel du Castellat were full of these treasures, to which the three cases, which he had brought with him from Britany, were to add their riches.

He was a man already advanced in years, and of extreme gentleness of manners, notwithstanding his austere appearance; he was

more timid than a child, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he could be induced to open his lips before a numerous assembly. But when once he had commenced his relations of the invisible world, he never grew tired.

The Marquise had a sort of superstitious fear of him.

If among the guests of the Hôtel du Castellat we have spoken first of the poor Commander Malo, it was *à propos* of the tradition of the black veil spotted with white tears, and the escutcheon of the Treguerns. Indeed, the traditional gift of second sight had played a terrible rôle in the life of the Commander.

Thirty-five years before the period at which our drama is resumed the Commander was a brilliant young man, full of bright hopes and thoughts of love.

On a certain autumn evening a numerous company had assembled at the large half-ruined farmhouse which all knew by the name of Château-le-Brec, to share in a modest and frugal feast ; a marriage feast, however.

The bride was a beautiful young girl named Catherine le Brec de Kervoz ; the young and happy bridegroom was Malo Le Mâdre, the younger son of Treguern. The latter would have laughed heartily if some person had told him that fifteen days after he would take the vows of celibacy to enter the order of Malta.

The dinner over, dancing commenced ; and while the others thus amused themselves, Catherine and Malo wandered off together to talk of love beneath the willows. While they were exchanging those sweet words which give a foretaste of Paradise upon earth, Malo suddenly turned pale as death.

They thought he had gone out of his senses, for he left his bride standing under the trees, and ran off to the church.

"Rector," he said, "light the tapers for Catherine le Brec, who is about to die."

Then he returned to the farm-house, where Catherine was waiting for him, a little angry, but still smiling.

"Catherine! Catherine!" he exclaimed, "take off those gay clothes. You have only time to make your confession and give your soul to God!"

All joy was banished from the house of feasting. After the first moment of astonishment was over a murmur ran among the relations and friends.

"Malo has seen the veil of Treguern," they said.

And Catherine, pale as a ghost, came and took his two hands in hers.

"Is it true, Malo?" she tremblingly asked, "is it true that you have seen between you and me the veil of Treguern, which announces death?"

As she spoke, the priest entered the house.

"Quick, quick!" exclaimed the young man, instead of answering. "Make your confession, my darling Catherine! Death will not wait!"

Catherine knelt down beside the priest. When she had finished her confession, her pale lips were tinged with blood, she turned towards her betrothed, and said: "Thank you!" then she died from the bursting of an artery.

The order of Malta still received professions, and Malo wore the mourning for his beloved under the robe of the novices of Malta. When the order was dispersed, Malo was commander. He had not desired liberty, for

liberty weighed upon him like a burden. Towards the commencement of the empire, he returned to Britany where his family was still struggling against adversity. The Commander Malo did not knock at the door of the manor-house, but went straight to the farm-house where Catherine's aged mother lived. Douairière le Brec received him and allowed him to take up his abode among the ruins of the Tour-de-Kervoz. There Malo passed several years, and this dwelling was not at all calculated to cure the dreamy enthusiasm of his mind. He surrounded himself with mystic books and plunged deeper and deeper into the imaginary world. The country people had almost forgotten his features, for he never went out by day; but if at times, upon the moor, under the willows of the Treguern meadow, or close to the churchyard walls, they saw a tall black form

slowly and silently gliding along on a moonless night, each one knew that that was the Commander of Malta.

Douairière le Brec, who feared nobody, would have fasted all day rather than have missed taking his food to him in the tower.

On the night of the fifteenth of August in the first year of the present century, two reports of fire-arms were heard upon the moor. All that night, from sun-set till dawn, a feeble light had been seen glimmering through the crevices of the Tour-de-Kervoz. The villagers had long said that the Commander Malo did not occupy the tower alone.

The persons who crossed the moor first on the next day had found a pool of blood in the bottom of the ravine. The Commander Malo, for once braving the daylight, went to the edge of the wood with an axe upon his shoulder and cut down a young tree. With

the tree he formed a rude cross, which he planted in the middle of the pool of blood.

From that day, no light had been seen glimmering through the crevices which gave air and light to the Commander Malo's retreat. Sometime previously a young seminarist had come and settled at the parsonage of Orlan, a youth, handsome as the angel Gabriel whose name he bore, and who came from the town of Feuillans, in Lower-Loire. We are speaking of twenty years before the time when we take up the thread of the story, and the Marquise du Castellat was then named Marianne de Treguern.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COMMANDER MALO.

THE people of Britany have as much fear and aversion of a man who, having been to the seminary, casts aside his cassock, as they have of the devil himself. But the hatred of the simple people of Britany is restrained by a due proportion of prudence, and you never hear a well-behaved lad speak any evil of *old Guillaume*, which is the delicate name for Satan.

When Gabriel, after having worn the ecclesiastical robes, called himself M. de Feuillans and became a personage, the people of Orlan, who knew his history, took off their hats and bowed to him a little lower than before; and nobody but some drunken fellow ever thought of saying as he passed in his splendid carriage on his way to the magnificent Château which he was building on the site of the old manor-house of Treguern, "There goes the abbe *pataud* in the carriage he has borrowed from *Gripi*!"

Gripi is another gentle name for Satan.

A good many things had come to pass before Gabriel de Feuillans had been able to build châteaux, and go to visit them in his carriage.

At the time when the Commander Malo had been living like a man-wolf in the Tour-de-Kervoz, the Treguern family had consisted

of three young people, who had neither father nor mother. The elder of these young people, the head of the family, although he had scarcely passed his twentieth year, supported his two sisters as well as he could, one of whom, Marianne de Treguern, who was by the first marriage, was nearly twenty-two, while the other, whose name was Laurence, was still quite a child.

Filhol de Treguern was a handsome youth, of a robust frame, and a serious turn of mind. The misfortunes of his family had deprived him of all the gaiety of youth. He had married too early in life, as frequently happens with young people whose childhood has been surrounded by sorrows; he had married a girl of noble birth, but of fallen fortunes, like himself, and his wife had already made him a father.

Filhol often said that he would give half

his life to bring back some of its ancient prosperity to the manor-house of Treguern, which was fast becoming nothing more than a mass of rubbish; but these were only words, he made no efforts to rise from his miserable condition, but awaited the moment of utter ruin, wrapped in gloomy discouragement.

Suddenly his manners were observed to undergo a complete change. Gabriel came and settled in the village, and Filhol bound himself by a close friendship to the young seminarist. There sprung up between them a romantic sympathy such as usually exists only between lovers; never did a passion related in story-books between a king and a shepherdess begin more suddenly than that which existed between these two young men. Gabriel had free entrance to the manor-house and as Marianne de Treguern was good looking, the wicked tongues of Orlan began

to babble, and to talk of nocturnal rendezvous which took place at the house of Douairière le Brec, the damned.

Nobody dared to denounce the seminarist, because Douairière le Brec was a sorceress, and because a malediction is so soon uttered.

Up to that time, Filhol had tenderly loved Geneviève, his wife. There is no utter misery where there is love, and in a little corner of his heart, Filhol was happy. One day Geneviève, poor devoted girl warned Filhol of what was being said in the bourg, with regard to Gabriel and Marianne, and, for the first time in his life, Filhol grew angry and used harsh words to his wife. From that time he behaved more distantly towards her and became even more intimate with the seminarist, and very soon Gabriel was more master in the manor-house than himself.

When they walked together, they were seen

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REPORT OF THE
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J. F. Campbell, Esq., a Scotch philanthropist, invented at the end of the last century under the name of *Regulated annuities on survivorship* that game of life and death which, in our day, fills the coffers of a hundred opulent companies in Europe. J. F. Campbell died worth upwards of a million and a quarter sterling.

The sexton thought he could not do better than to strike a light with his flint and steel burn the impious paper up on the same spot on which he had found it.

While the paper was being consumed, the sexton heard behind the hedge Filhol and Gabriel, who no doubt were coming back to look for their mysterious document; they were conversing, and the sexton could hear that they were talking, poor young fools, of a brilliant future and immense fortunes.

The future of Gabriel was to be a curacy

in some poor country place, if the clear-sighted Church did not drive him from its bosom; that of Filhol, was to die of starvation in his noble den. And they were talking of a hundred thousand francs!

That same day Filhol went to Redon, and mortgaged his last piece of land, to get a small sum of money; and when he had the sum, instead of returning to the manor-house, he reached the mouth of the Vilaine and went on board a lugger which was going towards Sarzean, bound for the coast of England.

Before setting out, he wrote to his wife and sister a letter which seemed to be dictated by intoxication.

"I want to be rich," he said, "and I shall be; on my return we shall all be happy, and the star of Treguern will shine forth in the sky once more. Have confidence in my friend Gabriel——"

Geneviève shook her fair head and turned her eyes, full of tears, towards the cradle, in which was sleeping the little Olympe, who was soon to be a year old. Marianne, on the contrary, clapped her hands, already almost beside herself with joy. Marianne was ambitious, and ambitious people desire so much that they are always ready to hope.

Laurence, Filhol's younger sister, began to rock the cradle of Olympe, laughing as she said :

“ When we are rich Olympe shall have a beautiful lace cap.”

She was a singular child, this Laurence, and when Gabriel came to the manor-house she would remain for hours together gazing at him from a distance. Once, when Gabriel had kissed the hand of Marianne, in fun, Laurence had ran away, and had been found

some time afterwards sitting upon the door-step, crying bitterly.

The absence of Filhol was not likely to impose silence upon the village gossip. Goodness knows that the tongues of the bourg of Orlan were not often idle. One morning the Commander Malo left his tower and came to the manor-house, for he was a Treguern, and the honour of the name belonged to him. He put his two hands upon the shoulders of Gabriel and considered him for a long time.

"Ah! ah!" he muttered, drawing a sigh from the bottom of his chest; "young man, it is you who are at the bottom of all this!

"Good day, my nieces," he added; "last night I saw my nephew Filhol hunting for fortune."

"Last night?" repeated Geneviève, trembling with joy; "then he is near here?"

The gaze of the Commander Malo seemed to wander a long way off into space.

"He is far from here!" he replied: "over there—beyond the seas. He is doing a thing which no Treguern ever did before—he is lying!"

He let go his hold of Gabriel and took the hand of Geneviève, who was crying.

"You are the best, Madame la Comtesse de Treguern," he said, in a serious and affectionate tone; "you will always obey, because you will never cease to love. When your son is born, observe his features well, to make sure that you will know him."

"I am not *enceinte*," faltered Geneviève, turning red.

Instead of continuing, the Commander stooped over the little Olympe's berceau and patted her cheeks with his fingers, muttering in a low voice:

"May God watch over the wife who will conceal her virtue as a crime! Mademoiselle, my niece," he continued, bowing to Marianne with a sort of raillery, "are you a le Brec, or are you a Treguern? I search into your heart. You will live long, and will have leisure to forget these days of misfortune."

Laurence listened in astonishment. He bent over her and pressed a kiss upon her forehead, pronouncing these two words—

"Love kills!"

Then he turned to Gabriel, who was struggling to keep a good countenance.

"Thou hast seen the adder change its skin," he said. "Son of a witch! False priest; the saints' coat burns thee! Woe to him who opened to thee the doors of the house of Treguern! Filhol is a man; if he kills thee before the fifteenth of August of the

coming year, he will see his daughter grow up and know his son ! ”

Gabriel was deadly pale, although he tried to smile.

The Commander Malo looked at him again, then he folded his arms across his chest, and passed out of the house without another word. After his departure, Gabriel did not remain at the Manor-House ; he returned to the Presbytery, going a long way round, and as he wandered at random through the fields and over the heath, he repeated to himself—

“ Over there ! far away ! a thing which no Treguern ever did before ! The eyes of that man must travel over the sea then, and penetrate the envelope which covers the heart ! And I ! and I ! ” he interrupted, with a shudder ; “ did he not speak as though his eye had sounded my conscience ? ”

He stopped upon the summit of an eleva-

tion which overlooked the bourg of Orlan. It was a lovely spring day, and the country lay smiling in the rays of the sun—a Breton landscape, with its horizon veiled by a transparent haze, with large and sombre forests stretching out into the plain-like promontories into the sea, and with moors level as a carpet, losing their red and blue tints in the distance. Gabriel wiped the perspiration from his brow and drew a long breath, for he had an oppression upon his chest. His eyes wandered over the country; he saw the forests upon the mountain sides, and the green meadows at the bottom of the valley, through which twenty silvery brooks were babbling over their stony beds; he saw the mills spreading out their long sails to the wind, and the farm houses with thatched roofs, from the chimneys of which wreaths of blue smoke were curling up into the sky; he saw the rich pastures, and

the immense flocks seeking for the fresh grass on the edge of the water, and forming a moving fringe along the river banks.

And then his eyes fell upon the scanty and thread-worn cassock in which he was clumsily buttoned up from his chin down to his feet.

"Nature is very beautiful," he thought.

Then he added, as a sceptical smile passed over his anxious face—

"Very beautiful for him who can say—
'She is mine! I am her master! these majestic forests belong to me, and I alone can hunt the stag here and chase the roebuck! These mills which animate the landscape are my tributaries; these fields ripen for me their harvests; all these brooks are here to fertilize my lands, to give drink to my flocks. My view is piercing, and the horizon is vast; far as the eye can reach, far as the horizon extends, all that I can see is my domain!'"

He held his head erect, and his eyes glittered as he uttered those words.

"But what of God?" he murmured, as a shade again came over his pale face.

His eyes wandered, as though in spite of himself, towards the little church of Orlan, whose modest spire seemed to overlook and protect the village; around the church the graveyard extended its green *ceinture*.

"God!" repeated the seminarist, pressing his cold hands upon his burning temples—"and death!"

He stood thoughtful and silent for a moment; then his rebellious head was thrown back, shaking his long fair locks.

"Eternity is longer than life," he said, taking a breviary bound in cloth from under his cassock, "but life comes before eternity!"

He seemed now to be in a sort of fever,

and he opened the mass-book with a convulsive gesture.

“Right, for eternity ; left, for life !” he exclaimed, like a child playing at the game of first letter.

He was obliged to look twice, for his vision was confused. On the right there was the word *Requiem*, on the left there was the word *Lætare*.

“Life has gained twice !” exclaimed the seminarist. “L against R ! Joy and fête against repose and death ! Thanks, my breviary !”

He closed the book and ran down the hill. Behind the hedge of furze, at some yards from the spot which he quitted, a strange head was raised, revealing a long and meagre face, surrounded by thick and long grey hair.

It was an old woman, who wore a cap like

those worn by the nuns of Saint-Benoit and a black silk gown.

She looked after Gabriel as he descended the hill, and extended towards him the white crutched stick which she held in her hand.

“Joy and fête!” she repeated, “to you who are of my blood, Le Brec! Le Brec! to Treguern, repose and death!”

When Filhol de Treguern returned to the Manor-House, he had not the air of a man who had made a fortune. His clothes were a little more worn than when he left, and his cheeks were paler and thinner. God knows that Geneviève, his wife, thought him handsome just as he was; but the pretty Marianne demanded of him the moment he arrived—“Well, brother, are we rich?”

Filhol replied—“Patience!” And when Gabriel came to the Manor-House he cried to him from the window—“All goes well!”

Filhol and Gabriel shut themselves up, and remained together till the middle of the night. Marianne tried to hear what they were talking about, for that charming young lady was curious, having set her mind upon becoming a marquise and going to Paris ; but Filhol and Gabriel conversed in whispers.

We will now relate what followed, simply and without comment. A week had scarcely passed since the return of Filhol, when he suddenly fell dangerously ill ; and at the end of three days, the disease had made such progress, that all hope of recovery was lost. The village doctor, who was not of the first force, after having ordered bleeding and emetics, declared that human skill was powerless against fate, and Filhol, thus given up, desired to be left alone with his friend Gabriel.

He probably wished to make his peace with Heaven, as Gabriel belonged to the

church, so Marianne and Laurence retired, followed by poor Geneviève, almost choked with her sobs. An hour after, Gabriel came out of the room, holding his handkerchief to his eyes, and said—"My poor friend has breathed his last!"

It is the custom in the bourg of Orlan, as elsewhere in Bretagne, to keep a public watch in the chamber of the dead; but Filhol was not a peasant, and his ancestors had done enough good in the parish to entitle him to a watcher from the Presbytery. The rector was absent and the curate was ill; so Gabriel filled the place of each as well as he could. Gabriel therefore watched by the corpse of Treguern, not only as a friend, but also officially.

And some particulars sufficiently remarkable were related of that melancholy night.

In the first place, the holy-water and the

aspergill remained outside the door all night, and no body was allowed to enter to sprinkle the defunct, as was the custom and the duty of the villagers. Those who came could only hear the young Abbe Gabriel reciting aloud the prayers for the dead in the funeral chamber.

As for Geneviève, the widow, Marianne, and little Laurence, they were all three in the hall, Geneviève sitting still, in a kind of stupor, with tearless eyes, holding her child in her cold arms, Marianne leaning against the window, and Laurence squatting upon the floor. They each understood, or thought they understood, that they had not permission to approach the bed upon which Treguern was laid out.

Towards the morning, Marianne and a charitable neighbour went to the mairie to make the declaration of the decease, which

had already been entered in the parish register, by the care of Gabriel.

He was admirable, this Gabriel. He put his friend's shroud on with his own hands, and with his own hands nailed down the coffin. The curate got up to read the mass at the burial, and it was again Gabriel who did all that was necessary during the ceremony.

The Commander Malo came when all was over. A few peasants alone remained near the newly-filled grave. The country people in Britany linger, on such occasions, as long as they can, and are, beyond measure, fond of giving vent to their griefs near the dead. The Commander Malo approached the grave, but he did not kneel down.

"Treguern ! Treguern ! Treguern !" he said three times. And, while those who were present shuddered with dread, he bent his

head down toward the ground, as though he expected a reply.

While he was thus occupied, Geneviève came up, carrying a poor little cross, with the name of Filhol, her husband, upon it. The Commander Malo, took the cross from her hands, and laid it flat upon the fresh earth.

Some of the villagers stepped forward and offered to plant it in the ground, but the commander waived them back, and said :

“ Wait ! I saw Treguern yesterday, and I did not see the veil. I have just called Treguern, and Treguern has not replied. Treguern must die three times, and his tombstone will be of marble, like that of the great knight Tanneguy.”

* * * * *

Before the end of the same year, Geneviève was frequently seen with smiles upon her lips,

as she carried little Olympe in her arms, and she never went to the grave-yard, where she had wept so much. The people of Orlan whispered among themselves that the poor young widow was insane.

Where could she be going, night after night, when Laurence saw her go out with little Olympe upon her bosom? The mother who does that which is evil leaves the child in the cradle ;—and, besides, Geneviève was so pious! Geneviève surely could not be doing evil.

Surely she could not be going where Mari-
anne, her sister-in-law went, who had no child to care for and to keep her from going wrong, but who followed the evil counsel of Douairière le Brec.

Some persons had met her, Geneviève, in the Treguern meadow, in the environs of the Tour-de-Kervoz, and others had often seen

Gabriel prowling about at night under the willows.

Did the false priest go there to meet Geneviève or Marianne?

They spoke also of some unknown person, of sombre aspect, who wandered about at midnight, between the manor-house of Treguern and the Pierre-des-Païens.

At the Tour-de-Kervoz, under the retreat in which the Commander Malo lived in such utter solitude, there was a crevice which served as an air-hole; and belated villagers thought they had once or twice seen a light shining from this hole through the bushes.

There were some who even said that they had heard voices, which seemed to come from the bowels of the ground, and they specified, for those who tell such tales are never at a loss for details to give them an appearance of truth. According to these

accounts, one of the voices was that of the Abbe Gabriel, the other belonged to Geneviève, and when they were silent, the merry prattle of little Olympe would be heard.

But there was still another voice, and here the narrators hesitated. Sometimes the cold perspiration came out upon their foreheads, for that other voice which came from under the tower resembled the voice of Filhol.

This went on up till the night of the 15th August, in the year 1800, on which night there was a wild tempest. That night the cries of women were heard in the mill of Guillaume Féru; and also on the same night two sergeants crossed the moor, coming from Redon, as well as a stranger carrying a valise.

Two shots had been fired near the path which ran above the copse of privet, and traces of blood had been found in the Trou-

de-la-Dette, where the Commander Malo had planted a cross on the next day.

Then the Tour-de-Kervoz had remained dark and silent, and neither light nor sound had since been seen or heard through the air-hole.

The Abbe Gabriel had left the presbytery, Geneviève no longer lived at the manor-house, and the voice of the dead Filhol ceased to be heard by the terrified villagers.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST APPARITION.

It was ten or twelve years after that terrible night, towards the last days of the empire. Marianne de Treguern was living in Paris with one of her relations who had given her a home, as well as her young sister, Laurence.

Marianne de Treguern could still pass for a very pretty woman, although she was now past thirty. With her, the mind did not

wear out the body. The Faubourg Saint Germain was being rebuilt, little by little, and some trifling conspiracies *à l'eau de rose* sprang up and died in the boudoirs, while the emperor was making of Europe an immense field of manoeuvre. M. le Marquis du Castellat was a conspirator; politics had brought him into connection with a young man of great expectations, who it was said was well known among the secret societies of Germany, and who set himself up as the personal enemy of Napoleon. This young man was named Gabriel de Feuillans; and those who regarded the return of the Bourbons as possible, assigned no limits to his future fortune.

One night when there was a party at the house of the relation who had taken the place of a mother to Marianne and Laurence Treguern, Gabriel was talking alone with Marianne in the embrasure of the window, while

the regard of Laurence, who was hidden among a crowd of young companions, was fixed upon them with jealousy and suspicion. Laurence had now reached her eighteenth year.

Nobody was near enough to Gabriel and Marianne to hear what they were saying; but their indiscreet eyes betrayed the words, and the eyes of Marianne had that expression which belongs only to some amorous vexation.

Laurence was very pale, and she felt herself tremble as she watched them.

The Marquis du Castellat was announced at this moment. A singular smile passed over Gabriel's face; and as he whispered a few words in the ear of Marianne, the contagious smile passed from his lips to those of the young lady. The Marquis du Castellat, a honest-looking gentleman between two

ages, smartly dressed, half bald, and playing in the most serious manner his rôle of conspirator, probably had no suspicion that he was the subject of conversation between the handsome Gabriel de Feuillans and Mademoiselle de Treguern. History does not relate that he had even observed the pretty Marianne.

Instead of replying to Feuillans, the pretty Marianne half-closed her eyelids to look at the Marquis more closely.

Then she made an affirmative sign of the head.

After which, Gabriel, without losing his smile, kissed her hand with respectful gallantry, and said—

“*Au revoir* then, Madame la Marquise!”

With these words he hastened away. As he was crossing the salon, his regard met that of Laurence, and his physiognomy changed

completely. A cloud came over his forehead, and he approached the young lady as though to ask her to dance, and said to her in a low and rapid voice—

“We must make an end of this, Laurence, for your jealousy is driving me mad! I am going to marry your sister to a marquis.”

Laurence looked at him, and her astonishment rendered her dumb.

There was no possibility of misunderstanding. Strong and profound passion was visible upon the features of Gabriel de Feuillans.

Laurence de Treguern was extremely beautiful; but suffering had already left its traces upon her pale and charming face. It was she to whom the poor Commander Malo had said—“Love kills!”

At the end of a month, the gossips of the great Parisian world had a history to relate: The Marquis du Castellat had carried off the

elder of the two Treguern girls, a portionless orphan, a girl who was fast losing the charms of youth, and who could not have made a very heroic resistance.

Why had the marquis taken her off? Why could not he marry like other people? Some wicked tongues spoke of a certain little romance of which the handsome Gabriel was the hero; according to this version, the Marquis had carried off Marianne, because Marianne, already engaged to M. de Feuillans, had resisted his love.

But everyone had noticed the assiduous attentions of M. de Feuillans to Laurence; it seemed therefore that he was in love with all the family.

However it might have been, the marquis soon re-appeared radiant and glorious, bringing his young wife upon his arm as a trophy; and the Hôtel du Castellat opened its brilliant

salons, and Laurence came to live with her sister.

One evening, in the year 1812, Laurence and Marianne were together in the bedroom of the latter; the Marquis was occupied with some conspiracy somewhere, I don't know where; and Feuillans was on a journey to England. It was the evening of a hot day, and the Marquise, according to custom, had on a light and fresh toilette, while Laurence wore a black dress, as though she was in mourning.

Laurence replied, with melancholy distraction to the tattle of the marquise.

"You are sad, sister," said the latter.

"It is twelve years to-day," replied Laurence, "since our brother Filhol died."

The marquise turned away her eyes with a shudder; she was one of those who shun gloomy recollections as the plague.

"He was very fond of us!" pursued

Laurence, with tears in her eyes; "and Geneviève, our poor sister, she is dead also, no doubt, since we have received no tidings of her for so many years!"

Marianne turned uneasily in her chair, impatient of the weight which these words placed upon her heart.

"And little Olympe!" continued Laurence. "Do you remember how like Filhol she was and how pretty she looked in her cradle?"

Marianne still remained silent.

Laurence rose from her seat and kissed her.

"Good-night, sister," she said, as she left the room, for she wanted to be alone to think and pray.

Laurence de Treguern had a good and noble heart.

The marquise was left alone. When her maid came to light the candles she dismissed

her sharply. The marquise had a temper of her own.

The bedroom of Marianne was a large chamber with a very lofty ceiling, and had been decorated with a rather severe taste by the first wife of the marquis. There were two doors, one of which opened into the ante-chamber, while the other communicated with the apartments of M. du Castellat.

The windows opened upon the garden.

The marquise leaned back among the downy cushions of her easy chair, more sulky than sad, indulging no very amiable thoughts against Laurence, who had so improperly, as she thought, evoked the dark visions of the past. Try as she would to get rid of them these visions remained obstinately around her—her brother stretched out cold and pale upon his death bed, her sister-in-law weeping with the child in her arms, and

mingled with all this, the strange face of the seminarist Gabriel.

The marquise closed her eyes, earnestly wishing to take refuge in sleep.

She could not tell whether she had really gone to sleep, or whether she was still awake, when she heard a voice, which whispered in her ear :

“Marianne de Treguern !”

The moonbeams were streaming in through the foliage of the large lime trees, illuming up the room with their silvery light. The marquise saw the Commander Malo standing close to her, holding by the hand a little girl who was hardly out of her infancy.

And the Marquise recognised at once, by the family likeness alone, her niece Olympe, her brother Filhol's little girl.

She tried to believe that she was dreaming; a sort of torpor chained her senses.

"Don't you think she has very much grown?" said the Commander Malo, whose wan face smiled sadly.

And Marianne felt that she answered in opposition to the evidence :

"I do not recognise her. It is not she!"

The long lashes of the child were lowered over the large, blue, supplicating eyes.

The Commander murmured :

"Marianne, do you want Filhol and Geneviève to come back to you and say: 'It is our child?'"

"They are dead—they are dead," exclaimed the Marquise, shudderingly. "The dead do not come back."

She saw the Commander stretch out his arms towards that part of the room in which stood the tent bedstead hidden among its velvet drapery.

"Turn this way," said he, "and look."

The curtains of the bed were raised, and the Marquise saw the moonbeams which came in through the windows converge and fall, like the light from an enormous lantern upon the counterpane of the bed upon which Filhol and Geneviève were lying, side by side, with their hands crossed upon their bosoms.

You would have thought it was one of those tomb-stones of ancient times, when the pompous piety of families placed recumbent effigies of their fathers upon their monuments.

The colourless lips of Filhol did not move, nor did those of Genevieve, but two feeble voices pronounced at once :

“It is our child.”

The Marquise tried to get up and fly, but fell back and fainted.

When she came to herself, the chamber was lighted up, and the closed curtains fell

in heavy folds around her bed. While the domestics were moving busily about the chamber, the little girl of her dream held a bottle of salts to her nose, and the Commander Malo, looking pale as death in his long black cloak, held out his hand and felt her pulse.

She looked at the little girl, who was smiling timidly up in her face, and shuddered to the marrow of her bones, as she said :

“ You are welcome, my niece.”

It was thus that Olympe de Treguern entered the Hôtel du Castellat.

CHAPTER IX.**JOSILLE AND VEVETTE.**

It was about the same hour when the diligence, containing the Commander Malo, M. Privat, and our friend Tanneguy, entered the yard of the inn in the Rue du Bouloi. It was growing dusk, and some lights were already passing from window to window along the front of the Hôtel du Castellat. Within, as

well as outside, the preparations for the fête were being completed.

There was to be a grand fête that night at the house of the marquise.

Under the bosquets of the magnificent gardens, in the walks, and upon the terrace, a swarm of valets were moving to and fro, placing the carpets which were to cover the platform for the orchestra, building up corbeilles of flowers *en amphithéâtre*, and arranging the rustic seats round the greenhouse. Here and there some lights began to appear in the arbours, and the last garlands were being hung in festoons to the columns.

It was no slight affair the illumination of the gardens of the marquise; it was necessary to study effect as much as at the theatre; it was necessary to concentrate the light upon the terrace and round the ball-room, and leave the grottos in shadow and mystery.

There was especially, at the extremity of a noble avenue of linden trees, a certain pavilion of the Louis XV. style, which it was important to consider in making the arrangements.

This pavilion bounded the property of the Marquise on the limits of that straggling locality then composed of timber yards and heaps of rubbish, which has since become the quartier François I. The weather had bent down the branches of the neighbouring trees upon the flat roof, so that the pavilion was lost as it were among a profusion of verdure.

In the cabinet of an amateur, among rare articles and valuable objects, you always find some favourite object which is worth all the rest of the museum put together. Such was the Louis XV. pavilion, in that rich and beautiful garden of the Hôtel du Castellet. It was the principal gem of the casket, and

nobody ever came to the Marquise's fêtes without declaring that this pavilion was a little marvel.

They called it the Temple de l'Amour.

But nothing beyond the exterior was ever seen; what there was within those walls, all covered with amorous sculptures, nobody knew. Some marble vases, filled with enormous clusters of red geraniums, were placed on each side of the steps. On the last step the hospitality of the marquise ended.

Many persons had asked what the marquise kept hidden away in that coquettish retreat, surrounded with exotic souvenirs—for if the present was unknown, the past had its chronicles—and more than one sprightly tale was told in which the first Marquis du Castellat had played his rôle of roué in this little temple. Some fifteen years previously this secrecy might have given rise to some

amorous suppositions, but Madame la Marquise was no longer a heroine of romance, and the long-haired dog, which she led about with her everywhere in a string, seemed sufficient for the requirements of her heart.

A page and a young girl, both armed with long poles, were putting lights to the lamps, which were artistically arranged under the lime-trees.

The servant girl seemed to be a shrewd lass, although she had the Morbihan accent; her bold and frank eyes sparkled with intelligence; and she laughed as others breathe, constantly, and without stopping. The page had not only the accent, but also the figure, of a lad from the neighbourhood of Vannes, or Redon.

He was named Josille Férù: we already know the name of the pretty Vevette.

She appeared to be a handy girl, this

Vevette, and by no means an idle one, for she was thus employing her time, as she awaited the return of her mistress. She was in full dress, and all adorned for the fête: she wore a smart and neat costume, which, properly speaking, was neither Parisian nor Breton, but which recalled that simple fashion among the villagers of the opéra-comique. It all fitted her like a glove, and Josille Féru was so occupied in looking at her that he scorched the boughs of the trees instead of lighting the lamps.

Josille was as fat as a sucking-pig, red in the face, and a good-looking lad enough, notwithstanding the perfect roundness of his cheeks; he was awkward, stuttered a little in speaking, and chattered like a magpie. At the bourg of Orlan, his native place, he had passed for a knowing lad.

“Oh, bother! Vevette,” said he, “when

we have a home of our own, we shan't want so many candles to amuse us. With the money that all these lamps cost, we could half furnish our house."

"A pretty husband you would make, Josille!" replied the lass, shrugging his shoulders; "you don't even know how to light a match; there, you have been groping round that lamp for the last quarter of an hour."

Truth to tell, the young lad was not very handy at his work, and, with no better lighters than he made, the marquise's gardens would not have been illuminated before the next morning.

"Listen to me, Vevette," he muttered, with emotion, "you were not so sharp as this when you were at home. I can't help looking at you to see how you are changed."

Vevette had no intention of allowing the

conversation to continue in this sentimental vein, for she demanded abruptly—

“Have you ever seen them—the three Freux?”

Josille trembled and was on the point of letting his pole drop from his hand.

“It is beginning to get very dark to talk of things like that!” he faltered.

“Bah!” said Vevette, “it is a long way from here to the Grand-Lande, and the three Freux won’t come after you so far as Paris.”

“I don’t know,” said Josille, casting an uneasy glance under the *bosquets*.

“Oh, stuff! my poor little chicken-heart,” exclaimed Vevette, who only laughed the more to see the seriousness of her companion; “if you are afraid of your own shadow like this, you have made a great mistake in coming here! This house is full of ghosts; they talk about nothing but ghosts and witchcraft here,

and there is a wizard lives in that pavilion you can see there."

"A wizard?" repeated Josille.

"A real wizard! But I will protect you against him, if you will tell me what Valérie la Morte is like."

"It is odd all the same," muttered the lad, "that they talk of the three Freux of Orlan, and of Valérie la Morte, here, in a big town like this."

"I'll wager," said Vevette, "Madame la Marquise, the Chevalier de Noisy, and all the company who believe in apparitions, will sit while the others are dancing to-night, and talk these stories over and over till the ball breaks up."

"Then they do just as we do at home on feast night?"

"Light away, Josille! light away, or we

shall be all behind!—Is she young, Valérie, I mean?"

Josille presented his light to the rebellious lamp for the tenth time, but the lamp appeared not to see it.

"I don't know whether she is young or old," he replied, "and, for that matter, spirits have no age."

"Where did you see her?"

"Behind the church, in the road which runs along under the churchyard."

"And are you quite sure that it was her you saw?"

"Am I sure! Oh! Vevette, it makes a cold shiver run all down my back even now; when you went away from home, I went into a fever, through grieving. To cure myself, I kept company with La Scholastique, who has a piece of land on the edge of the moor,

and two cows—two splendid cows! Then, one day, as I was coming from high mass, she threw a great stone at my face; I suppose she did it in fun, but I got in a passion and dipped her into Menain's pool right up to her neck. I could not help laughing when I pulled her out, though I was so wild. She had green slime hanging all about her, and the boys all run away holding their noses. But it did not hurt her much, and it was a capital spree, wasn't it? Well, after that she was fonder of me than ever, and she seemed as though she would have me after all! You are laughing! La Scholastique didn't laugh, I can tell you; she was more inclined to laugh on the other side of her mouth! And all the girl's said—'Josille Féru, lad, marry her, or it will be the death of her!'

Vevette went on lighting, light and active as a fairy, and Josille Féru followed close at

her heels, relating his story in a nasal and whining tone.

"Oh! what a proud lad you are!" exclaimed Vevette. "Did she pine, this poor Scholastique, who has a piece of land and two cows?"

"Such beautiful cows," continued Josille; "a red one and a black one. Scholastique said to me, said she: 'Come here when it is dusk, and you will see which way the wind blows.' So I went. There was no moon; but there they were all three, talking at the end of the old avenue of Treguern, before the Château-sans-terre—"

"The three Freux?" interrupted Vevette, stopping to listen.

"As true as I am here, Vevette, the three Freux, as black as moles; and they were saying, as they stood looking towards M. Gabriel's new château: 'that will come to us

with the rest, when the hour arrives.' I cut away, as fast as I could, with my fingers in my ears that I might not hear their voices; for the words of such like bring misfortune to whoever listens to them. When I got near the Pierre-des-Paiens, I saw a woman running along before me, and I quickened my pace, thinking it was La Scholastique. Oh, the deuce! it wasn't La Scholastique, and I would rather have found myself face to face with Douairière le Brec herself on a Saturday night. She stopped in the middle of the road, and waited for me. I am sure I saw her eyes gleaming like coals of fire in the middle of her pale face. The wind made her black hair wave back behind her, just as Mam'selle Olympe's long locks do; and she had such a fine waist—so fine that you would have thought that there could not have been any flesh under her waist-band. And yet

our young demoiselle Olympe, who is living, thank God! has a waist as fine."

"Did she speak to you?" again interrupted Vevette, in her anxiety to know.

"She told me to go away," replied Josille; "and when I first heard the voice of Mam'selle Olympe—"

"Go along; you are out of your mind!" exclaimed Vevette.

She laughed, but a closer observer than Josille might have seen an uneasy expression upon her face.

"You are right," he continued; "our young lady couldn't have been in Paris and at the bourg of Orlan at the same time, that's true. And then, why should our young lady climb over the wall of the church-yard?"

"Oh," said Vevette, "La Morte climbed over the church-yard wall?"

"Yes, and no mistake. When she told me

to go away, I only half obeyed her. I hid myself behind the hedge, and I saw her, as plain as I see you, glide along between the grave-stones, and get into the church through a window which had been left open, to let the air in."

"And what did she do in the church?"

"That's just what I don't know, for I didn't dare to look in, Vevette. I could see the light shining through the chancel windows, and I ran off home as quick as I could. Would you have gone near yourself?"

"Of course I should," replied the girl, valliantly. "Come, Josille, you are not doing a bit of good with your pole. Go up the ladder, and light those up there."

They were at the end of the allée of lime-trees, and the graceful front of the Louis XV. pavilion stood before them. As Josille placed

himself upon the ladder, Vevette heard him utter a loud cry.

"There! there!" he said, letting himself fall at full length upon the gravel; "they are there!"

From the windows of the pavilion a pale light was burning. Vevette sprang intrepidly forward, and ran up the steps, as Josille repeated:

"There! there! all three of them! I saw them! and the tombeau de Tanneguy also. Oh! good Lord!" he added, as the hot tears ran down his cheeks, "when the spirits get hold of you, it is all over with you. I have come away from home, I have lost La Scholastique, as well as her piece of ground, and her two cows—such beautiful cows, the red one especially. I have come miles and miles away, never to see all that again; and

here the tombeau de Tanneguy has come out of the choir of Orlan Church, and followed me all the way to Paris. And here are the three Freux—"

"There is nothing," said Vevette, from the top of the steps; "you were dreaming."

Footsteps were heard at the other end of the walk. The light which had been burning for an instant in the interior of the pavilion was suddenly extinguished. Josille stood leaning against the foot of the ladder, and he trembled so violently that his companion could hear the rungs rattling.

"You can't see anything!" he stammered; "then they were only visible to me; it's all up with me! There they were, all three, standing close to the tombstone, and behind them, leaning against the wall, there was something just like a tall skeleton."

He broke off to utter a stifled cry.

“There ! there !” he said again.

He could say no more. His mouth remained convulsively open, and his outstretched hand pointed towards the dense bosquets which concealed the garden-wall on the right of the pavilion.

All that portion of the marquise's miniature park was plunged in the most complete obscurity, for the light was entirely intercepted by the rows of lime-trees. On the left side of the walk, from the pavilion to the ball-room, all was resplendent—festoons of lamps were already glittering in all parts ; but the neighbourhood of these lights served only to render the darkness of that portion of the garden which was not illuminated more profound.

From the top of the steps Vevette followed Josille's gestures ; she thought that she saw, indeed, a confused movement under the thick

foliage, but the lamps of the façade, which she was just lighting, intercepted her view.

"Who's there?" she demanded, boldly, for this little Vevette was afraid of nothing.

Josille drew himself together as though he expected to hear the voices of the Freux of Orlan church-yard burst forth like three claps of thunder.

It was a sweet voice, a woman's voice, which responded :

"It is I, Vevette, I am waiting for you."

Josille felt sure, however, that he had seen the three men of the pavilion, whether they were living beings or shadows, glide away silently among the trunks of the trees.

Vevette jumped down the steps and sprang, light as a spaniel, into the shadow of the foliage.

The foot-steps which had been heard coming in the distance, along the Lime-tree-walk, for

some few seconds, were still approaching. Poor Josille was so overwhelmed with amazement and terror, that his intelligence was no longer at his command; he seriously believed he was dreaming when he saw approaching a kind of procession, composed of a valet in livery carrying a lantern, which was rendered quite useless by the illuminations, a tall, thin, and haggard-looking personage, dressed in black from head to foot, and the three hostlers from the Messageries each loaded with a large deal box.

There was not a person in the bourg of Orlan who did not know the strange figure of the Commander Malo.

Sitting by their fire-sides at nights, the villagers often talked of him who could tell, merely by looking at a man, whether he would live or die, and the least superstitious shuddered at the thought of that fatal veil

which fell before the eyes of a Treguern, when death was gliding after his marked prey. And the lad, Josille, was by no means the least superstitious.

Vevette had been right in saying that the pavilion was occupied by a wizard; Josille saw that but too plainly now! He slipped into a cluster of trees to leave the passage free for the terrible Commander.

The latter paused before the door of his pavilion, and ordered the men to put the cases down upon the steps.

"It is heavy!" said one of them. "While we are here, we may as well take them inside."

The Commander had introduced the key into the lock of the door, but he turned round and made a sign to the livery servant before turning it.

"Put them down," said the servant.

The three porters disposed their loads upon

the steps and wiped the perspiration from their streaming foreheads.

The valet in livery paid them and sent them away. When they were gone, not without casting some curious glances towards the door, Josille remarked that the valet did not offer to help the Commander Malo get the boxes in.

He merely said :

“Madame la Marquise hopes that monsieur will do her the honour to be present at her fête.”

Malo de Treguern turned his fixed but haggard eyes towards the valet.

“Her fête !” he repeated, as a mournful smile played round his lips ; “there will be more than one fête to-night ! Leave me.”

The valet bowed respectfully and hastened away.

As he listened to the sound of his steps dying away along the walk, poor Josille felt

his terror momentarily increasing, for there was no longer anybody with him but the Commander Malo, and he felt his blood curdle at the thought of being left all alone with the dread sorcerer.

The door of the pavilion was opened ; within all was dark. Malo de Treguern descended to the first box and pronounced over it some mysterious words of which Josille could not catch the meaning.

Then Malo tried to raise the box ; but he was feeble and the case heavy, so that his efforts were useless.

“ Let the person who is concealed there in the bushes come and help me ! ” he said.

Josille would have run a hundred miles away if he had had his will free ; but some unknown power seemed to urge him forward, and he crossed the path without having any consciousness of what he was doing. When

he reached the steps; the Commander Malo tied a handkerchief over his eyes.

One of the cases was raised, and, as he mounted the steps Josille could hear the Commander Malo puffing and panting. Poor Josille! He felt his blood turn to ice as he passed through the door and found himself surrounded by the cold and confined atmosphere of the interior.

It was there that he had seen the tombstone of Tanneguy, the skeleton, the dusty bones, and the three phantoms.

"Now for the second," said the Commander.

They made two other journeys, then Josille found himself standing upon the steps before the closed door.

The bandage was no longer upon his eyes, and he rubbed his inflamed eye-lids and looked around him, dazzled by the illumina-

tions which were scattered all over the garden.

At the windows of the pavilion, a red light appeared for an instant, then vanished, as though some one had drawn some thick blinds over the panes.

Josille would not have remained in that place for an empire, but his legs staggered under the weight of his body, and the feeling of his loneliness almost crushed him. What would he not have given to have heard Vevette's merry voice.

He thought he saw her, Vevette, in the dark bosquet in which he had hidden himself a few minutes before; something white was certainly moving there in the shade of the dense foliage. Josille had the courage of fear, and he ran forward calling out to the young girl.

The white object immediately began to move away, gliding swiftly among the trees

like a vapour; and, at the same time Vevette came gaily laughing and singing towards him.

As he opened his mouth to make some lament or to ask some question, Vevette put her hand upon his lips and said,

“Hush! listen!”

They could hear in the darkness the sharp sound of a knocker striking upon the plate of a door.

A knocker! a door! in the midst of the verdure, under the tall trees, in that sort of little wood where there was no sign of a human habitation. It was decidedly a dream.

“Wait for me in the avenue,” said the young girl hastily, again plunging into the thickest part of the brake.

Josille could distinctly hear the creaking of hinges close at hand. But what does it matter what a person hears thus, when his

senses have wandered and lost themselves in the land of chimeras. At the end of a minute, Josille saw Vevette returning, as she had promised. She was accompanied by a decently dressed little man wearing spectacles who had absolutely nothing supernatural about him.

“Josille,” said Vevette, who seemed to have great difficulty in repressing a roguish smile, “show this gentleman in to Madame la Marquise who is expecting him.

CHAPTER X.

THE BOUDOIR OF THE MARQUISE.

MADAME LA MARQUISE DU CASTELLAT was at her toilet; a grave affair, for Marianne de Treguern had already passed her fortieth year. She was losing her hair, her figure was acquiring too much embonpoint, and a certain air of fatigue was visible upon her puffed features.

There was evidently a struggle going on

within this woman, between present inquietude increased by the incurable sadness of memory, and an earnest desire to bury both the past and the present in forgetfulness.

The boudoir in which she was sitting was a small room of octagon shape, furnished in the mode of the last days of the empire. On the same night on which Olympe de Treguern, still a child, had been introduced into the hotel in the mysterious manner in which we have described, the marquise had abandoned her bedroom and taken another apartment, and from that day she had never dared to look into the place where the frightful vision had occurred to her.

Four portraits, surrounded with frames all alike, hung against the walls of the boudoir. The first was that of the Marquis du Castellat; it was a honest and good-humoured face, polite, rather destitute of intellect, surrounded by a

peruke, and wearing the eternal smile of well-bred portraits. On the opposite side, the Marquise, in a white satin dress, was respiring the perfume of a bouquet of roses.

On the left of the fire-place, Laurence de Treguern, perfectly like her, that is to say, perfectly beautiful, fixed its melancholy regard upon the fourth portrait, which was that of Gabriel de Feuillans.

Gabriel, in this portrait, did not appear to be more than thirty. A black cloth cloak hung from his shoulders, and his white hand, finely veined, held a half open book. It was a pensive and severe face, under the calm lines of which strong passions could be divined; the hair grew high upon the cranium, the contour of the visage was slightly sunken below the temples to fill out again at the cheek-bones, and from thence down to the chin described the most harmonious oval. The



eyes were long, overhung with long lashes, and possessed a stern and haughty look, while the nose and mouth, with lips which were a little too thick, seemed as though they were sculptured out of bronze.

At the period at which the likeness of the Marquise du Castellat had been painted, she could still be called the pretty Marianne. Her pretentious head-dress and her regular features, but round and characterless, showed up the noble beauty of Laurence. Laurence had been painted during the same year in which she had died, and those who had known her saw in this almost celestial countenance, and in its sweet yet impressive regard, the vague sadness of her last days.

It was long since the Marquise had resembled that young and rosy portrait, which hung smiling against the wainscot ; but that night she was so gloomy and worn that she

appeared to be ten years older. She was seated before her toilet table, and her maid was weaving too many flowers among her scanty hair.

"There was some *mylord*," said the maid, pursuing the conversation, which had been commenced, "who wanted the little house with the green sun-blinds. M. Stéphane gave I don't know how many thousand francs for it."

"This M. Stéphane is rich, then?" demanded the Marquise, pronouncing the name with affected indifference.

"I should think so," replied the cameriste; "he broke Frascati's bank. Madame la Marquise knows that the windows of the little house open opposite to Mademoiselle Olympe's rooms."

"No," said Marianne de Treguern, turning her head; "I had not remarked that."

"Just opposite! and there is not a single tree between. I think M. Stéphane comes to the hotel very often now."

The marquise pretended to be looking attentively at the work upon her head-dress, and pointed out some faults, as though to break off the conversation. But it appeared that Juliette, the cameriste, was at liberty to speak.

"Such a near neighbour!" she continued, as her practised fingers set to rights the imperfection indicated by her mistress, "and a young man who goes so much into society; I am sure Madame la Marquise can have no objection to it. M. de Feuillans knows him; he is very intimate with him, and goes to see him very often."

"M. de Feuillans does what he likes," interrupted the marquise drily.

Then she added, holding up the head dress with both hands,

"It does very well now, Juliette. I will call you to put on my jewellery."

Juliette went towards the door; but before going out a malicious glance shot from beneath her eyelids.

Many a philosopher has asked why every woman has in her maid an intimate enemy.

Directly she was alone, Marianne de Tre-guern rose from her seat and began to walk up and down the room with slow steps. A darker cloud was upon her face, and the lines deepened upon her forehead.

"Stéphane !" she murmured, "why does Gabriel leave me in this uncertainty ?"

Juliette had carried away with her the candle which had been upon the toilet-table, and the boudoir was now lighted only by a single globe lamp, standing upon a small writing-desk, the light of which fell upon several letters which lay scattered near it.

All these letters were still sealed, and the marquise, in passing the desk, turned away her eyes, as though some secret repugnance had prevented her from opening her correspondence that evening.

I don't know why this coquettish boudoir had now, by the undecided light of the lamp, a desolate appearance. The four portraits, only half lighted, were sadly looking at each other. The marquise let herself sink down upon a *fauteuil*, and placed her face between her hands, at the risk of crushing her new head-dress. The woolly-coated dog, curled up in a corner, got up, stretched out his obese limbs, and came and rolled himself up at the feet of his mistress, uttering low whines.

"Stéphane!" murmured for the second time Marianne de Treguern, as she heaved a deep sigh; "but what is the good of racking

my brain about it? Can the young man of twenty have any resemblance to the child which is taken to be christened? Besides, I know that the young man is at the Château-le-Brec—”

In pronouncing these words, “the young man,” her voice slightly changed.

She took up one of the letters from the table at hazard, and opened it mechanically. It was upon blue paper, with a printed heading, and the writing was traced in the plain and firm hand which habit gives to men of business.

“The late Marquis du Castellat having no children,” said the letter, “disposed of his entire property in favour of a stranger. The position of Mademoiselle Olympe de Treguern is regular and perfectly legal; the document appears to me in due form, and there is no ground whatever for a law-suit.”

The marquise crushed the letter between her fingers.

"She well knows that," she muttered, "How much longer shall I be mistress here? Perhaps I owe some gratitude for her kindness in keeping me in her house."

She took up another letter, which she held in her hand, without casting her eyes upon it.

"Who knows" she said, thinking aloud, while a peculiar smile played round her lips; "Gabriel loved me also once, and I am called the Marquise du Castellat. Gabriel loved Laurence, and Laurence is dead. Gabriel loves her now—who knows?"

The letter which she held in her hand was written upon coarse brown paper, and clumsily folded, and the address was traced in large and irregular characters. When at length the eyes of the marquise fell upon this missive which had found its way into her

elegant boudoir, she trembled and turned pale.

“Douairière!” she exclaimed.

She broke the seal with nervous fingers, and read:

“—— Marianne, you did well to fly from here. My nights are terrible, and I often see those who are dead.

“What I have done, I did for you and Gabriel; you have both abandoned me. Well, perhaps there is a Providence.

“Malo de Treguern has been here in his tower; he says the hour is come, and that the old tree is about to re-blossom. May I be dead when the Treguern’s rise again!

“This is to announce to you that you will soon see the lad; he has gone away as the other went some time ago. It was not I who sent him away. However I had had my

doubts for a long time; they were born so near to each other. We deceived the priest, Fanchette may have deceived us. The boy has not the face of a Le Brec.

"When you see him, look at him well. Gabriel looked at him the last time that he was here; but he said nothing. Why should he love his child, the man who has no love for his mother?

"The hour of the last struggle is at hand. The voices which used to speak to me in the silence of the night are now silent; my blinded eyes no longer see into the future. You are still young enough to suffer in this life. Adieu, Marianne; we have built upon the sand, and my tenderness has been your misfortune.

"FRANÇOISE LE BREC DE KERVOZ."

"P.S. The three Freux have disappeared,

and La Morte is no longer seen here. The villagers found the Treguern escutcheon nailed to the principal door of the Châteaux-Terre, as the palace which Gabriel has built in the place of Filhol's manor-house is called here; and everybody says that the Treguerns will return. Privat, the advocate, who defended Roland Montfort, has set out for Paris. Take care to warn Gabriel, if you have not separated your fortunes from his."

An expression of terror and almost despair was painted upon the features of the marquise; each word of this letter was for her a menace. While she was folding it up, she saw upon the desk a small square note, the address of which was written in an unknown hand.

This note contained but two lines, and said :

"I shall have the honour of presenting

myself at the house of Madame la Marquise du Castellat this evening, at eight o'clock precisely."

It was signed with the name of Privat.

The marquise turned with a sudden movement towards the clock, the hand of which stood exactly at eight.

"It is he!" she exclaimed, "that man who undertook the defence of Roland Montfort! What can he want with me? I will not see him."

She violently rang the bell, and said to Juliette, who came running to answer the summons:

"Tell the porter at once, I am not at home to a M. Privat, who is to call at eight o'clock."

As Juliette turned round to obey, she came face to face upon the threshold, with a

decently dressed little man, who smiled as he took off his hat, with an air of modesty.

He moved out of the way to let the maid pass, and said, with perfect self-possession, as he advanced towards the marquise,

“Exact to the minute, as you see, madame. M. Privat, advocate, who has come a hundred leagues to have the honour of presenting his respects to you.”

He bowed, and, turning round, shut the door in the face of the maid, while the marquise watched him in the utmost astonishment.

Privat was much better dressed than when we saw him in the yard of the Messageries; he had on black pantaloons, almost new, over thick, but well-blackened boots, a very good black coat, though much too large for him, a waistcoat cut *à la papa*, and a white cravat, tied in a bow, which would have been the envy of a village bridegroom.

His nose was pointed, his mouth was large and smiling; his little eyes looked over enormous spectacles, round as penny pieces; his thin but florid cheeks moved up and down when he spoke; his extremely high brow terminated in a bald point, and the hair, artistically brushed up, endeavoured in vain to cover the nudity of his bumpy cranium.

All this may have been very ugly, but all this was perfectly satisfied with itself—brisk, lively, even restless, and relieved by a touch of humour which was not void of wit.

“My dear lady,” said he, returning to the marquise, and taking a tone of benevolent good humour, “I expect you do not remember me. We have grown older, both of us, and, as for myself, I acknowledge that I should have had great difficulty in recognising you.”

Marianne de Treguern threw a glance

towards the bell-pull, but she did not touch it.

“Will you be good enough to tell me, monsieur,” she said, “what has procured for me the honour of this visit?”

Instead of replying, M. Privat pursued in a half playful tone :

“Do you know it is a long trot from the Innocents, where I live, to the Allée de Veuves. My means do not allow me to take *voitures* wherever I go, so I came on foot. If Madame la Marquise will permit me——”

Marianne de Treguern did not allow him to conclude; she pointed with her finger to a chair.

But it seemed that M. Privat preferred *fauteuils*; he pushed back the chair indicated, and wheeled an arm-chair near to the marquise. That done, he sat down with a voluptuous sigh, and stroked down his waistcoat

à la papa, as a lord in a comedy strokes his frill to put it into the correct folds.

"I am acquainted with your young neighbour, M. Stéphane Gontier," he said, without preamble, always looking at the marquise over his round spectacles ; "if he had allowed me, I would have made a man of law of him."

"M. Stéphane Gontier rarely comes here," interrupted Marianne de Treguern.

"Bah !" said the little man ; "but it appears that it is thus in Paris : you live next door to each other, and you scarcely know each other. I shall have the pleasure of bringing this young man to see you more often ; he is a youth of honest principles and very good manners."

The marquise endeavoured to smile.

"Was it for that you came here, monsieur?" she inquired.

"I am fond of business," replied M. Privat, pushing up his spectacles with a rapid and precise touch; "first impressions, as you are aware, madame, are absolutely decisive. My father was husher-audiencer in the Seneschal's Court, at Redon. I was born there, my cradle was surrounded with rolls of parchment, and the first air my lungs breathed was that which was exhaled from old briefs—the atmosphere of business, madame; my native atmosphere."

The voice of M. Privat grew animated, and his little eyes were already sparkling behind his bluespectacles. The marquise had crossed her hands upon her knees. An instructive dread told her that these eccentric preliminaries were only the mask of a serious attack; so she waited to hear what would come next.

"In my father's office," continued the little man, in a slightly moved voice, "there was a

bureau showing square pigeon-holes right up to the ceiling, all full of green cases which were so crammed that they would not shut; there were files full of papers thrown in heaps in the corners like the sheaves of a ripe harvest; there were heaps of dusty parchments with their edges all shrivelled, which were covered even to the margins with writing, small, cramped, faded, illegible——

“There!” interrupted M. Privat, “the papers of your family alone, the Treguern papers, would have filled this boudoir. Ah! ah! that’s what I call something like a heap of papers! Enough to ruin a king, or to give a beggar the fortune of a prince, according to luck! Well, madame, you may believe it, if you will, child as I still was, I had deciphered all that—I understood all that—and all that was not enough to satisfy me!”

He sat up in his chair.

"I wanted something more!" he exclaimed with a burst of pride; "I had pictured to myself a case—but such a case as is hardly ever seen—something obscure, complicated, inextricable, an imbroglio of a thousand persons, a sort of macabre dance whirling deliriously round a mountain of gold!"

Yet this little man had not the appearance of a poet.

Marianne de Treguern hoped for an instant that he was out of his mind.

M. Privat had thrown himself back in his chair.

"Cross-interests," he pursued, seeming to have a keen relish for the picture he was drawing, "knotted and entangled, like a skein of thread; people changing their names, registers of births lost, and wills falsified; living persons passing themselves off for dead, and dead people coming back again; murders over which time has passed—a case,

madame—a case heroic and splendid! a nocturnal and pitiless struggle, such as takes place it is said between the Indians in the forests of North America; a desperate battle in the limbus; a romance of Ann Radcliff; an epoch *à la* Milton; insane efforts, atrocious deceptions; the civil code sharpened like a sword, the penal code keen as an axe; extravagant sums shovelled up; impossible phantasmagorias in the midst of our incredulous world—and I alone, I, understand you, in this profound night, piercing the darkness I don't know how, with eyes like owl's, turning aside the veil, disentangling the mysteries and collecting into these hands all the threads of this gigantic intrigue!"

He held out his hand, which was dry and shrivelled as that of an old woman.

"Do you understand?" he added, as he wiped away the perspiration which had come out upon his forehead.

"No," returned the Marquise du Castellat, who was fibbing perhaps.

The little man half closed his eyes, and looked at her fixedly.

All the enthusiasm which had lighted up his features a moment before had fallen as if by magic.

"No?" he repeated, abruptly changing his tone; "well, just so; all the world cannot have my tastes. What I have been saying was in answer to the question which madame la marquise did me the honour to address to me. One fine day, when I was no longer searching, I found this immense affair, which I had dreamed of from my childhood. Chance thus gave me my *rôle*, and if I have crossed the threshold of this hotel, it is because madame la marquise is engaged in the same case with me."

Marianne de Treguern made a hasty gesture of denial.

“ This is the fifteenth of August,” pursued the little man, without taking any notice of this gesture ; “ and it is twenty years, day for day, since your young neighbour, Stéphane Gontier, was christened in the parish church of Orlan. Another child was carried to the font at the same time with him. I have just made the journey from Bretagne to Paris with that other child, who is now a fine youth, I give you my word ; and I have come to your house, madame la marquise, because I desire to know which of these two young men is your son.”

END OF VOL. II.



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